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Dennis Ross, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

No deal

SYRIAN President Hafez Al-Assad has rejected Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's offer to resume peace negotiations. The offer makes the extent of Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights proportionate with the type of security guarantees Syria is prepared to provide, the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* and AFP reported yesterday.

During a three-hour meeting on Tuesday with a 42-member Arab Israeli delegation on a weeklong visit to Syria, President Assad renewed Syria's commitment to peace but said Damascus would not accept a peace that does not involve its recovery of the entire Golan.

Assad called Netanyahu an enemy of peace but had words of praise for Israel's Labour Party. Labour MP Saleh Tarif said he gave Assad a message of peace from party leader Ehud Barak. *(see p.4)*

Homes razed

ISRAELI bulldozers protected by a large police force and border guards yesterday demolished nine new Palestinian homes on the outskirts of the Shuafat refugee camp in Arab East Jerusalem.

It was the biggest single assault in months on Arab housing built in occupied areas without official Israeli approval. The operation sparked clashes between stone-throwing youths and Israeli police who fired rubber-coated bullets at the protesters, AFP reported.

US closure

THE PLO was notified by the US State Department on Tuesday that it would have to suspend its activities in Washington because the Congress failed to renew legislation allowing the office to operate. State Department spokesman James Rubin said work would continue at the same address, but the letterhead and the way in which the phone is answered has to change, Reuter reported.

Rubin stressed that the US will continue to have contacts with the Palestinian Authority (PA) in pursuit of peace while trying to persuade Congress to renew the authorisation that expired yesterday.

If the law is not renewed when the Congress resumes its sessions in September, the PLO office will have to close permanently. Additionally, US aid to the Palestinian Authority will be cut off and the US would be obliged to vote against UN or World Bank money for the authority.

Exports back

IRAQ announced its return to the oil market yesterday after a break of more than two months, during which it suspended oil exports until a new food distribution plan was drawn up.

Under a UN oil-for-food accord launched in December Iraq was allowed to export $2 billion worth of oil every six months to buy food and medical supplies. Because of the break, Iraq only has 24 days to export $1 billion worth of oil and the Cyprus-based Middle East Economic Survey said it was likely to fall short of the target, AFP reported.

The US temporarily blocked the purchase of 100 French ambulances by Iraq to verify whether the transaction violated the oil-for-food deal, the State Department said on Tuesday. Ironically, the first customer for Iraqi oil was Bayoil of the US.

INSIDE

'Security for both sides'

President Mubarak warned against the "incalculable consequences" of a continuing Israeli blockade of Palestinian territories. Nevine Khalil reports

President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday the revival of security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians was "necessary" and "important" for both sides and simultaneously called for an end to the Israeli blockade of Palestinian territories.

Mubarak warned that Israeli sanctions were "very dangerous" and could have "incalculable" consequences. Mubarak made the remarks during a two-hour meeting with university students at the International Conference Hall in Alexandria. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Higher Education Minister Moufid Shehab were both present at the meeting.

Mubarak said American envoy Dennis Ross returned to the region to revive security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians, "which is necessary for both sides," in the wake of the 30 July bombings in West Jerusalem that left 14 Israelis dead. "Achieving security for both sides is very important," he said.

The bombings, Mubarak continued, had "negative consequences for the peace process," and went on to condemn terrorism against innocent civilians, be they Israeli or Palestinian.

He warned that the blockade imposed on the Palestinian territories since the bombings must be lifted.

Progress in the peace process, Mubarak added, "is the only guarantee for achieving security in the region and, therefore, negotiations must continue."

Mubarak praised a recent statement by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as "encouraging" because it stressed the importance of the land-for-peace formula and UN Security Council resolutions as the basis for a comprehensive peace.

He said President Clinton's position is "very clear" concerning the need to make progress towards peace. "Everybody wants a compromise formula to re-start negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis in order to solve this very complicated problem."

Mubarak said America's role remains central to the peace process, describing the European role as "complementary."

Egypt, for its part, cannot persuade the Palestinians, or any other party, to accept proposals "unless they are fair... Egypt does not pressure any party to accept what runs contrary to that party's interests."

While disclosing that Egypt had played a part in formulating the Hebron re-deployment agreement — without the Egyptian participation, no agreement would have been reached, he said — the president went on to scotch rumours that a four-way summit grouping him with Yasser Arafat, King Hussein and Binyamin Netanyahu was in the offing. He said extensive preparations for such a summit were necessary "or else it will turn out to be a media event without any positive outcome."

Asked about yesterday's meeting between Hussein and Netanyahu in the Red Sea resort of Aqaba, Mubarak replied that all concerned parties were "making maximum effort in one direction, which is to achieve peace," adding that there were "continuing consultations" between himself and the Jordanian monarch.

Mubarak said that American aid to Egypt, amounting to $2.1 billion annually, was not being used as a bargaining chip to influence Egyptian policy, adding that he hoped Egyptian-American relations would continue to thrive.

Addressing Iranian-Egyptian relations, the president said that following Mohamed Khatami's rise to power he desired an improvement in relations and hoped to see the problem of Iran exporting terrorism to Arab countries resolved. He announced that Egypt will take part in next December's summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Tehran as well as a sports tournament there. "It must be made very clear that Egypt's participation in both events means nothing more than that," he added.

On Turkey, Mubarak said Turkish-Israeli relations should not be "directed against any Arab country in order to establish an axis of influence on regional security. We are against alliances and axes," he said.

He disclosed that a planned Turkish-Israeli military exercise was postponed after he contacted President Suleiman Demirel because of "awkward timing. The exercise gave the impression that it was directed against Syria and Lebanon, especially since it came at a time when Turkish military forces had advanced 200km into Iraq," he said.

Mubarak again called for the establishment of a common Arab market in order to promote inter-Arab trade and investments. The first step could be the creation of a free trade zone between Arab countries or the merger of several bilateral cooperation committees linking the Arab states, he said. *(see p.2)*

'Dangerous moments' in Aqaba

ISRAELI Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said in Aqaba yesterday he would ease the crippling sanctions imposed on Palestinians as soon as he sees action to crack down on terrorists.

"What we would like to see is the fulfillment of the commitment to fight the terrorists and as we see action, any action taken in that direction, we shall adjust and change our measures accordingly," he said at a joint news conference with Jordan's King Hussein following their summit in the Red Sea resort city.

Netanyahu sealed off the Palestinian territories, blockaded West Bank towns and froze tax revenue owed to the Palestinian Authority after the double suicide bombing in West Jerusalem on 30 July.

He demanded Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority crack down on anti-Israeli groups before there could be a resumption of peace negotiations and an easing of the blockade.

"The measures we have been forced to take as a result of the recent tragedy in Jerusalem are meant to assure security and not to act in any way against the Palestinian population," Netanyahu said.

King Hussein described the current crisis in the peace process as a "dangerous moment" and said there was a need for "whatever can be done to avoid further bloodshed."

He said he sensed a "genuine desire" from Netanyahu to continue on the path to peace. "I am convinced, as I have always thought in the past, that [Netanyahu] is a partner for peace and he is committed to it and hopefully he will be able, together with his colleagues, to make their full contribution to peace, through the cessation... all of the acts that jeopardise peace," Hussein said.

Netanyahu said Israel has information that more terrorist attacks were being planned. "We have information about the possibility, the planning of additional terrorist attacks as we speak," he told the news conference.

"If they are not stopped, terror has the power to sweep aside all the progress that we can make and put the very idea of peace in jeopardy," Netanyahu said.

"Our concern... is that our ability to continue the process of negotiations and the progress towards peace could be very seriously impaired if the proper action against additional terrorist attacks is not taken," he added. *(see p.5)*



photo: Randa Shaath

Fancy a little night music? Then head for the Citadel, where the Ninth Festival of Music and Song opened on Sunday *(see p.12)*

Walking a tightrope

Has Arafat abandoned the Palestinian consensus that security coordination must be linked to progress in the Oslo peace process? Graham Usher writes from Jerusalem

At the close of Dennis Ross' four day mission, Palestinian opinions were divided as to whether it augured a revamping of the Oslo process or merely another stage in its demise.

Both sides attempted to extract as much political capital out of the visit as possible. Israeli government spokespersons insisted that Ross shared their vision that security was the "core" of the Oslo process. Palestinian Authority (PA) figures countered that the US envoy was "receptive" to their arguments that PA/Israeli security cooperation could not be separated from the substantive political issues of Israel's closure and settlement policies.

Most commentators, however, believe the real verdict on Ross' trip will be delivered by his secretary of state, Madeleine Albright. Should she decide to travel to the region by the end of the month, it would signal that, as far as the Americans are concerned, Yasser Arafat is living up to his side of the security bargain. The PLO leader would almost certainly welcome this, since his sole strategy now vis-à-vis Oslo and Israel's Likud-led government is to expedite American involvement at every stage.

Ross' initial stance was to endorse Israel's security priorities. President Clinton and Albright "understand that there is essential security underpinning to the process. And that security underpinning has to be put back in place," said Ross after meeting with Netanyahu on 10 August.

That night he met with Arafat, who immediately authorised a three way meeting between Israeli, PA and US intelligence officials. This and a similar meeting on 11 August were "steps in the direction of re-establishing [the security] relationship," said Ross. The Israelis were less impressed. "We are not going to accept these meetings as a substitute for substance," said Netanyahu's media advisor, David Bar-Ilan.

By "substance" Bar-Ilan means the sort of punishments Arafat inflicted on his Islamist opposition after the suicide bombings in Israel in 1996. In the two weeks since the blasts at Jerusalem's Mahane Yahuda market, Israeli military officials have handed their PA counterparts a list of 31 Palestinian fugitives they want extradited into Israeli custody and another 88 Palestinians they want arrested in the self-rule areas.

Netanyahu has also made it clear that he wants Arafat to go after "the terrorist infrastructure" in the PA areas by closing down mosques, schools and other Hamas affiliated institutions. Addressing the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on 9 August, Arafat said the aim behind such orders "was to ignite a [Palestinian] civil war." It is a view shared by the PA leadership, who suspect that Netanyahu's dictates are less about wiping out "terrorism" than wiping out Arafat and the PA.

Does Ross accept Netanyahu's agenda? According to the Israeli commentator, Hemi Shalev, the Israeli government and the US agree that security cooperation is the precondition for any renewal of negotiations. But there appear to be differences over what measures can be realistically demanded of Arafat. Rather than mass arrests and a "comprehensive war" on Islamist civic institutions, "the Americans are willing to accept more modest proofs of a change in Arafat's policy," writes Shalev in *Maariv* on 12 August. These include "an intensive investigation of the attack at Mahane Yahuda, and the arrest of specific persons implicated in terms of terror activity".

Given the current mood in the Occupied Territories, Arafat is going to have a hard time convincing Palestinian opinion of even "specific" measures. PA security chiefs have repeated that as yet there remains no firm evidence linking either Hamas or Islamic Jihad to the Mahane Yahuda bombings and, without this, any crackdown would be viewed as the PA bowing to Israeli dictates. Fatah West Bank leader, Marwan Barghouti, has gone further, insisting that there should be no security coordination until Israel lifts the siege of the West Bank and Gaza. On 11 and 12 August, mass Palestinian demonstrations were held in Gaza, Ramallah and Nablus, protesting the closure and warning the PLO not to bend to Israeli and American pressure. The protests enjoyed the backing of both Hamas and Fatah.

Arafat is thus walking a fine line. By accepting Ross' "security first" agenda, he has in effect abandoned the Palestinian consensus that security coordination must be related to progress in the Oslo process as a whole. The aim, says PLO official, Nabil Amr, is to drive a wedge between the positions of the Americans and Netanyahu and so "open the door to Albright's visit."

Such unilateral concessions have rarely paid dividends for the PLO in the past. It remains to be seen whether the gamble will come off this time when, and if, Albright arrives on the scene. *(see pp.4&5)*

Safeguarding Arab rights

EGYPT conducted intensive consultations with other key players this week to ensure that any progress made by American envoy Dennis Ross "does not undermine basic Arab rights," reports *Dina Ezzat*. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa affirmed that security coordination between Israel and the Palestinians should fall "within the framework of the provisions of signed agreements" and should run parallel to the lifting of the crippling sanctions clamped by Israel on the self-rule territories.

Moussa said that the discussion of "core issues" must await the arrival of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the beginning of September, but cautioned that "nobody expects Albright to come with a magic wand."

Moussa, asked if the revival of American mediation efforts constituted a "carrot" to persuade the Arabs to take part in the Middle East-North Africa economic conference scheduled for November in Qatar, responded: "If it is an edible carrot, and if it is coupled with Israel honouring its commitments, then that could be a good re-start."

Mubarak briefs university heads

DURING a five-hour meeting in Alexandria on Sunday with the presidents of 12 universities and the board of Alexandria University, President Hosni Mubarak spoke in detail about the problems facing Middle East peacemaking. He blamed Israel for the current deadlock which, he said, could lead to more violence and tension.

According to Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research Mofeed Shehab, Mubarak also spoke of the latest consultations held with the various parties, including the United States, but he did not divulge details. Mubarak emphasised that any further delay in peacemaking is bound to harm all peoples in the region, including the Israelis. "The Egyptian people, who chose peace as a strategic goal, hope that other countries in the region share this viewpoint," Mubarak said.

The president spoke of Egyptian-US relations, which he described as "developing on both the political and economic levels". He also reviewed Egypt's relations with Sudan and Libya as well as Iran and Turkey. Mubarak said that Cairo's foreign policy in general aims to improve relations with all countries as well as political organisations such as the United Nations, and economic ones like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Mubarak affirmed the importance of inter-Arab economic cooperation and integration. "Its about time that an effective Arab common market is established, beginning with a free trade zone," Mubarak said.


President Hosni Mubarak during his meeting with university presidents

Sorour responds to attacks and drops El-Said's immunity

Reversing an earlier decision by the People's Assembly, Speaker Fathi Sorour ordered former Economy Minister Mustafa El-Said stripped of his parliamentary immunity. Gamal Essam El-Din investigates the reasons behind the surprise move

Barely two months after the People's Assembly overwhelmingly voted against stripping former Economy Minister Mustafa El-Said of his parliamentary immunity, Speaker Fathi Sorour invoked his constitutional powers to reverse the decision. A statement issued by Sorour's office said he acted after receiving a request from Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr to drop El-Said's immunity so that he could be investigated for alleged breach of trust.

The statement said that Sorour is empowered by the Constitution to do so because parliament is in a summer recess, adding that the earlier decision had to be reversed because "new aspects" in the case had become available.

Two requests to drop El-Said's immunity were submitted to the Assembly in June by businessman El-Toukhi Ali El-Toukhi, alleging that El-Said misappropriated LE1.471 million in cash and two cheques worth LE100,000 which were entrusted to him to deposit in bank accounts. The requests were approved by the Assembly's legislative committee on the grounds that it would be better for El-Said to face a prosecutor's investigation and clear his name. But when they reached the Assembly itself, they were turned down.

During the Assembly debate, El-Said denied the allegations and produced two certified receipts, proving that the two cheques had been duly deposited. He also insisted that the accusation that he misappropriated LE1.471 million was unfounded.

The third request to drop El-Said's immunity, which Sorour approved last week, did not mention the cheques but was confined to the allegation that he misappropriated the LE1.471 million. "The new aspects" in the charges against El-Said involve the allegation that he had already received the LE1.471 million in instalments to buy El-Toukhi a factory but he pocketed the amount for himself.

Sorour's initial rejection of the request to strip El-Said of his parliamentary immunity had exposed him to a hostile press campaign by opposition newspapers as well as the national weekly *Akhbar El-Yom*. A major opposition newspaper charged that Sorour used double standards in approving or rejecting requests for dropping an MP's immunity. Sorour has threatened to take legal action against *Akhbar El-Yom*, declaring that he was "asked by many MPs to take action to uphold the Assembly's honour and pride."

Akhbar El-Yom also attacked El-Said, accusing him of corruption and financial malpractices. He was accused of using his position to conduct illegal brokerage deals and was castigated for acting as a consultant to Mona El-Shafei, a businesswoman on trial along with five officials of the public sector El-Nasr Export and Import Company for illegally receiving hefty credit facilities from the company.

El-Said told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the businessman who asked for his immunity to be dropped made use of *Akhbar El-Yom* "after discovering that there were disagreements between me and its editor. But the fact remains that all the accusations are entirely unfounded and are sheer lies."

According to informed sources, El-Said decided to fight back by submitting a request to Prosecutor-General Raga' El-Arabi for dropping the parliamentary immunity of Ibrahim Se'eda, *Akhbar El-Yom*'s board chairman, who is a member of the Shura Council. El-Said claims that Se'eda slandered him repeatedly on the pages of the newspaper.

Sorour, for his part, said that requests filed by ordinary people to drop an MP's immunity, such as the two requests rejected by the Assembly, could be motivated by malice and should be carefully scrutinised. But requests filed by the justice minister cannot be malicious because they are usually preceded by careful investigation by the prosecutor-general.

The anti-Sorour press campaign took him to task for his many foreign visits, describing him as a modern Ibn Batouta — a Middle Ages Arab explorer. He was accused of starting the Assembly's summer recess early this year so as to get ready for his globe-trotting. The Assembly allocated LE4 million out of a total budget of LE53 million for parliamentary trips to foreign countries in fiscal year 1996-97. Parliamentary delegations visited 30 foreign countries. Sorour himself stayed for 22 consecutive days in France, Monaco and the United States this summer.

Mohamed Abdallah, chairman of the Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee, defended the visits as "parliamentary diplomacy". "It is not enough for a parliamentary diplomat to stay at home, talking about foreign events and policies. Foreign visits are quite important to have the voice of Egypt heard in international parliamentary and foreign circles," Abdallah told the *Weekly*.

Sorour himself said that most of his foreign trips were carried out in his capacity as chairman of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), with the Union footing the bill. Sorour also said he is happy to be dubbed Ibn Batouta. "Ibn Batouta was a great explorer who left a great impact on Arab civilisation. It is an honour to be called Ibn Batouta," he said.

Sorour was also accused of ramming through the Assembly's final sitting six international agreements, four of them with USAID. By doing so, it was said, he undercut the MPs' responsibility for supervising international agreements thoroughly and monitoring how their proceeds are spent.

Ayman Nour of the Wafd Party said the speed at which the agreements were approved did not give him time to submit to the Assembly several documents that allegedly prove that aid money is misspent. Sorour, in a television interview, responded that he decided to submit the American grant agreements to the Assembly's final sitting because the government was in urgent need of the funds provided by these agreements to finance a number of vital economic and social projects.

Minister lashes out at Islamist newspaper

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi says *Al-Shaab* newspaper, which has targeted him for the past two weeks for alleged influence-peddling, is acting as a mouthpiece for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and terrorist organisations. Khaled Dawoud reports

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, in his first public reaction to a fierce campaign launched against him by the opposition *Al-Shaab* newspaper, has challenged its editor-in-chief, Magdi Hussein, to produce documents that prove the charges of influence-peddling and financial malpractice levelled against him.

Al-Shaab is the mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, which forged an alliance with the illegal Muslim Brotherhood in 1987. Hussein has already been sentenced, in three separate cases, to a total of three years' imprisonment for libelling El-Alfi's son, Alaa, and his former wife. He also received a year's suspended sentence last year in another libel suit filed by Alaa El-Alfi. Hussein has filed appeals against the three-year sentences. If he loses, the suspension will be abrogated and he will have to spend four years behind bars.

Al-Shaab's campaign against El-Alfi began after Hussein was sentenced two weeks ago to two years' imprisonment in two of the libel suits filed by Alaa El-Alfi. In bold front-page headlines, the newspaper accused Hassan El-Alfi of using his influence as interior minister to conclude highly lucrative business deals. Other senior Interior Ministry officials were also accused of neglecting official duties in favour of trading in real estate and undertaking other lucrative business.

In a full-page article in Tuesday's edition of *Al-Shaab*, Hussein accused El-Alfi of selling a villa he bought in 1993 to Abdel-Wahab El-Habak, the former public sector manager who was sentenced in July to 10 years imprisonment and fined LE180 million, a sum he had amassed illegally while in office. Hussein alleged that the sale took place in July 1996, only two months before Habak's arrest, by which time it was common knowledge that he was guilty of financial malpractice.

Habak had agreed at the time to reimburse the state treasury $20 million in the hope that no charges would be brought against him.

The crucial point about the sale, Hussein alleged, was that Habak paid the minister LE600,000 for the villa, which El-Alfi had bought for LE88,000 in 1993. Hussein alleged that Habak agreed to pay such a high price for the villa in the hope that El-Alfi would block his prosecution. He quoted alleged contracts signed by El-Alfi and Habak and provided the serial numbers of cheques which he said had been received by El-Alfi.

A week earlier, Hussein had written that El-Alfi had no right to claim that he was fighting crime and thuggery because he himself was involved in similar activities. He claimed that he knew of 10 confirmed corruption cases, in which El-Alfi was allegedly involved, and that he would publish details of one of them each week.

El-Alfi, in statements to reporters on Monday, rejected *Al-Shaab*'s accusations. He said they were part of a campaign which had been orchestrated by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, "a front for terrorist organisations," after he had rejected a cease-fire appeal from imprisoned leaders of militant groups in early July.

"There is not a single truthful word in what the newspaper published," he said. "These are fabricated lies. I challenge the newspaper to publish a single document that can confirm a single letter of what it has been publishing."

El-Alfi said the Interior Ministry would "take the official measures which we consider necessary at the proper time to stop this wicked plot." He argued that the goal of *Al-Shaab*'s campaign was to undermine the morale of the security forces "at a time when they have achieved great success in confronting terrorist and other illegal organisations." He added that Hussein's prison sentences were behind the escalation of his verbal attacks against the Interior Ministry.

El-Alfi filed a complaint last week with Prosecutor-General Ragaa El-Arabi, accusing *Al-Shaab* of publishing "false information." But Hussein had not been summoned for questioning by the time *Al-Ahram Weekly* went to press on Wednesday.

El-Alfi said he would not be giving away a secret by revealing that Hussein had contacted him several times in an effort to get his son to withdraw his libel cases. "But I decided that the matter should be left to the judiciary, so that this violation of journalistic ethics would be dealt with," he said. "If what happened had taken place in any era other than that of President Hosni Mubarak, the newspaper would not have remained open and its reporters would not have remained free. President Mubarak has respect for democracy and freedom of expression."

Hussein, in a telephone interview with the *Weekly*, denied that what he published in *Al-Shaab* was libel. "I am exercising a constitutional right. I have the right to criticise public officials as long as I have documents that prove what I say."

Hussein said he was not worried by the fact that more libel charges might be brought against him "because all that I have written is based on facts. Interior Ministry officials use their influence to accumulate wealth, and I have many documents to prove that."

Hussein denied that he had targeted El-Alfi in revenge for his prison sentences. "We at *Al-Shaab* have always worked on revealing cases of corruption that may involve cabinet ministers. If I have documents proving corruption, I will publish them. It is a matter of principle."

He conceded, however, that the fact Tuesday's edition of the newspaper had not been confiscated was "an indication of the freedom we enjoy to publish what we have. What is important is that this should continue."

Shooting Sadat's assassination

A book about President Sadat's assassination, reports Mona El-Nahhas, is about to be turned into a movie

Following the success last year of *Nasser '56*, a film about Gamal Abdel-Nasser and the Suez crisis, another movie is about to be produced about the late President Anwar Sadat and his assassination in 1981. It will be based on the book *Assassination of a President*, by journalist Adel Hammouda.

The film will show how Sadat was killed by four members of the Islamist Jihad organisation as he reviewed a military parade celebrating the eighth anniversary of the October 1973 War. It will project the characters, living conditions and trial of the four assassins: Khaled El-Islambouli, an army officer, Ata Tayel, a reserve officer, Hussein Abbas, a volunteer sergeant and Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Aal, a retired officer.

Led by El-Islambouli, the men jumped from a military vehicle during the parade, ran toward the reviewing stand where Sadat was sitting, firing automatic rifles and exploding hand grenades. Sadat and eight others were killed.

In the book, the writer raises the question of whether the four assassins acted alone or were part of a conspiracy. He notes that El-Islambouli's connections with Islamist militants were well-known and that his companions managed to take part in the parade by using forged military cards.

Hammouda gathered the material for his book from the investigation carried out by military prosecutors, the trial of the assassins and Arab and foreign press reports.

The author, who was present at the parade, said the idea of writing the book occurred to him immediately following the assassination, but it did not appear until 1985. The first edition sold out within a few hours. "People were anxious to know the facts and the book was the first and most courageous work to deal with the assassination," Hammouda said.

The main problem that faced Hammouda while writing the book, he said, "was how to prevent the reader from sympathising with the assassins who relieved Egypt of a dictator."

According to Hammouda, the idea of turning the book into a film was floated following the success of *Nasser '56*. "The large number of people who flocked to cinemas to see that film was an indication that Egyptians have a strong desire to know their history," he said.

Scriptwriter Beshir El-Deek is currently working on the script, and Mounir Radi is the producer and director. Radi said he was enthusiastic about the film because it depicts a very critical period of Egypt's history. He decided to bear the costs of production himself, rather than ask Egyptian Television to finance the film, as was the case with *Nasser '56*. "I prefer to do it myself to guarantee that the film will have both accuracy and credibility," he said.

This will be Radi's third film after *Days of Anger* and *A Visit by the President*.

The roles of the assassination squad were given to new actors. "We had to choose them very carefully, because as well as being talented, they also had to look similar to the killers," he said.

Movie star Mervat Amin has agreed to play the role of Sadat's wife, Jihan. Radi declined to divulge the name of the actor who will play Sadat, predicting only that his choice will be a "big surprise."

Most of the film will be shot in the studio; the assassination scene will be filmed on location at the parade grounds.

Half of the film will be devoted to the trial of the killers; the screenplay will provide a detailed background about the Jihad organisation, its activities and finances. It will also shed light on Sadat's last days, which witnessed wide-scale detentions, suppression of freedoms and corruption.

The film's message, Radi says, is "that in the absence of freedom and democracy, bullets are the only alternative. In a word, the film is a warning to dictators everywhere."

Pharaohs' archive described as 'nonsense'

Egyptologists, speaking to Omayma Abdel-Latif, have dismissed two British Egyptomaniacs' claim to have pinpointed the location of the pharaohs' hall of records

Egyptologists were sceptical this week about a claim by two British amateur archaeologists to have located the site of an ancient underground chamber, near the Giza Pyramids, containing evidence of what they called a "lost civilisation." Pyramidologists have dismissed the claim as "another hoax by Egyptomaniacs."

According to a story published by the *Sunday Times*, Nigel Appleby, an engineering designer, and Adam Child, who works for British Telecom, were preparing an expedition to investigate the site near the Pyramids where they believe the hall of records lies buried in the sand.

The *Sunday Times* said that, according to legend, the hall of records is made of granite and sheathed in gold and contains artefacts and documents on the history of mankind. It is said that its discovery will herald a new dawn for civilisation.

Appleby and Child believe that the hall of records was "probably inside a small pyramid buried by shifting sands."

Disputing this theory, Reiner Stadleman, director of the German Antiquities Institute, said the Pyramids were sacred places of burial. It runs contrary to the pharaohs' concept of the pyramid that they would set up a "worldly archive in such a sacred place," he said.

"There could never be such a thing as an archive in or near the Pyramids, which were considered as sacred by the pharaohs," agreed Abdel-Halim Noureddin, a professor of pharaonic archaeology and former head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. "The pharaohs used to keep documents of birth, inheritance and so forth in administrative buildings. The idea that they kept a hall of records in the area of the Pyramids is unheard of."

Noureddin said there was no firm evidence of the existence of a hall of records anywhere.

"The only ancient archive that we know of is at Tal El-Amarna in El-Minya province. It is located in an administrative building adjacent to the Temple of Tal El-Amarna, which was devoted to the worship of the god Atum," Noureddin added.

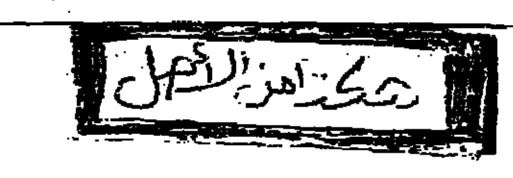
Pyramidologist Tohfa Handoussa also dismissed the claim as "nonsense." She pointed out that no papyri dating back to the Old Kingdom had been found in the Pyramids area. The collection of religious and funerary texts on papyri dates back to the New Kingdom Pharaoh Onas, she said. The documents are known as the 'pyramids' texts'.

According to Handoussa, "the pharaohs were familiar with archiving systems. Many of the temples had a room which was known as the library, which contained all the legal documents and official papers of citizens."

Appleby and Child claimed to have obtained permission from the Egyptian authorities to excavate for one month in the area where they believe the secret chamber is buried. If the search proves promising, they said they hoped the authorities would allow them to be involved in any subsequent excavation work.

But Ahmed El-Haggar, an antiquities official at the Pyramids, denied that the Britons had been granted permission.

"The last permission we gave was for a British mission from Manchester University and it was not about finding a secret archive," he said. "As far as we are concerned, the claim of the two Britons is baseless."





Abdel-Rahman gives blessing to cease-fire call

The call by jailed Islamist militant leaders to halt anti-state violence is gaining momentum. But, as Dina Ezzat discovers, there are strings attached



Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, spiritual leader of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, who is in jail in the United States, gave his blessing this week to a call issued by militants imprisoned in Egypt for an end to anti-state violence. Although the cease-fire call initially appeared to be unconditional, Islamist lawyer Montasser El-Zayyat told *Al-Ahram Weekly* there were pre-conditions. He said Al-Gama'a expected the government to stop arresting its members and to release "a good number" of detained militants.

Responding to Abdel-Rahman's message, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi said the government welcomed attempts to promote security and stability. But at the same time he vowed to fight "firmly and decisively" any attempt to undermine public order.

Abdel-Rahman's message was delivered by his American lawyer, Ramsey Clark. "The sheikh gave me a message to deliver; his exact words were: I gave my blessing to the invitation to stop the violence and I ask others to support it," he said. Speaking to the *Weekly* on the telephone from New York, Clark added that the almost 60-year-old blind cleric took his decision after a lengthy review of Egyptian press reports on the issue and careful consideration of the messages that had reached him from other members of Al-Gama'a inside and outside Egypt.

"He seemed confident that this is what he really wanted. His health is very poor but his mind is certainly functioning and that was his decision," Clark said in reply to a question on whether Abdel-Rahman's state of health was sufficiently good to allow him to make a decision like this, which could drastically alter Al-Gama'a's policies.

El-Alfi commented on Monday that, in principle, "Egypt welcomes any action or words that could serve to promote security and stability" because "it is the realisation of stability that we are aiming at, in order to create the right climate to attract more investment and tourists." However, on a more sceptical note, he observed that "such calls aim to slow the pace of the security forces in their confrontation with the terrorist groups." At any rate, he added, the security forces would not stop their war against violence and "will firmly deal with any attempt to stir unrest."

To date, there have been no serious indications that a deal, even a tacit one, will be struck between the two sides engaged in the cycle of violence that erupted in the summer of 1992.

El-Zayyat, a long-time lawyer for Al-Gama'a, listed the prerequisites attached to the proposed cease-fire, which had initially appeared to be unconditional. "They expect the government to stop rounding up their members, release at least a good number of the over 30,000 detainees held in custody under the Emergency Law and stop trying Islamists accused of launching armed operations in military courts," he told the *Weekly*. According to El-Zayyat, "this is not too much to ask" if the government took into consideration "the positive impact that such a deal would have on the image of the state and what it could do to attract foreign investment."

Several calls for a cease-fire between the Islamist militants and the state have been made over the past few years. A serious dialogue on a truce was opened by former Interior Minister Abdel-Halim Moussa. As a result, he lost his job and was replaced by El-Alfi.

El-Zayyat believes that this time things are different. "In the past, the group had considerable strength and was launching almost non-stop attacks, sometimes in the heart of the capital, targeting some senior state officials and security figures. Opening a dialogue at the time appeared to put the state and the group on an equal footing. The state would not accept this image at any price." But now, he added, Al-Gama'a was not in good shape "and that could encourage the state to move ahead."

But his view appears to be anathema to Interior Ministry officials. A deal with the militants is out of the question. This was indicated by El-Alfi's pledge to continue the war against violence and by the government's decision to put large numbers of militants on trial before military and state security courts this year. Analysts also believe that it would be illogical for the government, highly successful in the war against the militants, to seek a deal with them at this point.

The weakness of Al-Gama'a makes Hisham Mubarak, a human rights activist and author of the 1995 book, *The Terrorists are Coming*, believe that the state is unlikely to alter its policy. Mubarak argues that since the security forces have had the upper hand for a long time, and members of Al-Gama'a inside Egypt have almost lost touch with the expatriate architects of their attacks to the extent that their assaults have been fewer, further apart and completely outside Cairo, the government would not feel inclined to give the impression that it is caving in. "Logically, the government does not seem to have a reason to start releasing the detainees or to stop referring militants to military courts," said Mubarak. He added that there are "no signs to suggest that the government is going to take this path."

A month ago, a group of Islamist militants on trial announced in the courtroom that their jailed leaders were urging their followers to halt anti-state violence. The call was initially rejected by some expatriate Al-Gama'a leaders who insisted that militants should continue the "struggle" to overthrow the government and establish an Islamic state.

Mubarak said: "Those in favour of continued violence are mostly the militants who lived in Afghanistan for a while and who think that they have the means required to sustain assaults despite the current phase of weakness. But the leaders in Egypt, who are more aware of the full dimensions of the situation, know that it is becoming very tough."

El-Zayyat insisted that, "Given that Omar Abdel-Rahman is the uncontested spiritual leader and decision-maker of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, his ruling is final and binding." He denied that Al-Gama'a had abandoned its cause of establishing an Islamic state, but said the group would try to find another path by which to spread its word.

This week, a bulletin printed in Europe by Al-Gama'a affirmed that the group "has always believed and still believes that the [militant] operations were an exercise in self-defence and were never an objective as such. Al-Gama'a has often called for a halt of violence and is still doing so, pending the response of the authorities to our requests." However the bulletin added: "This said, Al-Gama'a is not prepared to compromise its stances in any way."



Air-conditioned buses aim to ease traffic and upgrade public transportation *photo: Emad Abdel-Hadi*

Slick buses on the shuttle

Cairenes can move now from the heart of the capital to the airport or from the Pyramids to Heliopolis in air-conditioned buses for only LE2. Abeer Anwar takes a ride

In an effort to encourage motorists to abandon their cars and use public transport, a new service was introduced last week which officials hope will ease Cairo's perennial traffic congestion. Air-conditioned public buses, each seating 52 passengers, began shuttling between the Pyramids and Heliopolis and also between the heart of the capital and the airport. The fare is a mere LE2.

The idea first occurred to Nabil El-Mazni, head of the Public Transport Authority, two years ago. "The streets of Cairo are packed with private cars and there are constant traffic jams. So I thought 'why don't we offer private car owners, as well as other members of the public, a means of transport that is comfortable and also cheap?' " El-Mazni said. He hopes the new service will encourage private car owners to leave their cars at home and so reduce the strain on the capital's streets.

Mohamed Taha, who is in charge of the new service, emphasised that the LE2 fare equals, or is even less than, the cost of parking.

Elia Kamel, a 25-year-old Heliopolis resident, said he was making use of the new service which he described as "an excellent means of transport. My car is small and it is not air-conditioned so I abandoned it in favour of the new buses," he said. "I used to reach work in a bad temper because of the traffic jams, now things are different."

Shereen Khattab, who previously used the metro to reach her work at Roxy Square in Heliopolis, said she found the new buses faster and more comfortable. Smoking is forbidden in the new buses and all passengers must be seated.

There are 25 new buses serving three routes and they run approximately every 15 minutes. The first, No 355, begins at El-Hegaz Square in Heliopolis, passes through downtown Cairo and Giza to the Mena House Hotel at the foot of the Giza Pyramids. The second, No 356, takes the same route but, instead of taking Pyramids Road, it goes along Faisal Street. The third, No 357, *connects Abdel-Moneim Riad Square, near Tahrir* Square, in the heart of the capital, with Cairo Airport.

The first two routes are served by nine buses, which will soon be increased to 11, and the third has seven.

Another plus for the new buses is that they also carry a passenger's luggage. Each suitcase or bag costs 50 piastres.

"Instead of paying between LE30 and 50 for a limousine to drive me to the airport, I started to save and take the new bus for LE2.50. This is perfect for me," commented Ahmed Adel, a businessman who travels frequently.

The buses are, on average, 90 per cent full. This rises to 100 per cent during rush hours, Taha said. The distance between Abdel-Moneim Riad Square and the airport is covered in one hour and from the Pyramids to El-Hegaz Square in one hour 20 minutes.

El-Mazni said that he has received several calls from people asking that the new service be expanded to include Zamalek and Mohandessin. "I am studying this possibility," he said. "Our goal is to upgrade public transport and streamline traffic."

Newspaper for the 'mainstream'

A surprising combination of Islamists, Nasserists and secularists are seeking to publish a weekly newspaper to monitor what they call mainstream Egypt. Amira Howeidy reports

A group of would-be founders of the Wasat Party, widely believed to be a front for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, were joined by Nasserists and secularists in an attempt to put out a new weekly newspaper by the beginning of 1998. The application to establish the Wasat was turned down last year and its would-be founders are fighting a battle in court to gain legitimacy. But the would-be publishers of the newspaper, to be called *Al-Mustaqbal* (The Future) insisted that it was not an alternative for the party.

The would-be founders of the party who also applied for publishing the newspaper are: Abul-Ela Madi, a former member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and a former secretary-general of the Engineers Syndicate; Essam Sultan, a lawyer and former member of the Brotherhood; Tawfik El-Shawi, a professor of law at Cairo University and a former member of the Brotherhood; Salah Abdel-Kerim, deputy secretary-general of the Engineers Syndicate; Rafiq Habib, a social researcher with the Coptic Evangelical Centre and the son of Samuel Habib, head of the Evangelical Church in Egypt.

The 22 would-be publishers also include Mohamed Selim El-Awwa, a prominent Islamist lawyer; Abdel-Wahab El-Messeiri, professor emeritus at Ain Shams University and author of several books on Islam and secularism; George Ishaq, adviser to Maronite schools; Dia Rashwan, a researcher with the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies generally regarded as a Nasserist; and Wahid Abdel-Meguid, another researcher with the Al-Ahram Centre who heads the Cairo bureau of the London-based *Al-Hayat* newspaper. They also include actor Abdel-Aziz Makhyoun.

The choice for the newspaper's chief editor has not been decided yet, but sources from the group told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that most likely he would be Wahid Abdel-Meguid. "He does not represent a certain political trend and is accepted by all: the Islamists, secularists and, more important, the government," one source said.

"We are not simply the Wasat. We are a group that shares common ground with others in trying to discover mainstream Egypt," Rafiq Habib said.

According to Habib, the would-be publishers decided to put out the newspaper for two reasons. The first is to fill a "void" in the press and media which "lack a cultural scheme to define the founding principles of the nation." The second reason is that the domestic political scene, despite the diversity of its forces, lacks the ability to renovate itself. "If a renaissance is to take place, it will not be made possible by the mere existence of various parties or groups, but by creativity and renovation," Habib said.

"We realised that the best way to achieve this goal is to publish a newspaper that is produced by different people who represent different trends," said Habib. They were also encouraged by a newly-modified publications law, which facilitates putting out new newspapers.

The procedures, however, will take a long time. So far, the would-be publishers have simply filed an application with the Shura Council, informing it of their intention. The next step is to file another application with the Supreme Press Council and then take it to the Economy Ministry's Companies Authority, which is empowered to license new companies. Before this Authority issues the licence, it has to gain the approval of security authorities. "We know that the name of Abul-Ela Madi by itself could abort the whole project," Habib conceded, "but if this happens, we will take the matter to court."

Habib's concerns were shared by other would-be publishers, who insist that *Al-Mustaqbal* is more than another Brotherhood attempt to gain legality. "There are other names that should not be ignored and which prove that the aim of the newspaper is larger and much more comprehensive than Madi's history," said a source who requested anonymity.

Madi remains reticent, refusing to discuss the new newspaper, and several other would-be publishers also preferred to keep a low profile.

Madi, a Brotherhood member until late last year, applied to the Political Parties Committee in January 1996 to establish the Wasat Party. The would-be founders were mainly Brotherhood figures but they also included two Christians. Three months later, he was arrested, put on trial and then acquitted. His application was turned down by the Committee. Madi and other Wasat co-founders said they resigned from the Brotherhood last November.

For Dia Rashwan, the most important feature of *Al-Mustaqbal* is that it brings together a large number of people representing various trends from across the political spectrum. "We are all different but we agree on goals and principles and we accept our differences," he said.

This variety should not be a surprise, Rashwan said. Similar attempts were made in the past to find common ground, such as an attempt to agree on a Charter of National Consensus in 1995. This attempt, by the various opposition parties and other groups, to lay down the foundations of a new multi-party democracy, was thwarted when Brotherhood spokesman Maamoun El-Hodeibi and Tagammu Party Secretary-General Rifaat El-Said refused to compromise.

But *Al-Mustaqbal*'s would-be publishers do not include Tagammu or Brotherhood representatives. "This is true, but Madi is originally from the Brotherhood and the Nasserists are part of the leftist trend that is represented in Tagammu," said Rashwan. "We are all trying to reinterpret the others and see how we can work together despite our historical differences."

But what is TV and theatre actor Abdel-Aziz Makhyoun doing in this political group? "*Al-Mustaqbal* is not a political party," he responded, "It is simply a group of people who are trying to resist the strong waves of Westernisation and push forward our social and cultural heritage. Producing a newspaper is a good way of doing this."

If the application of the would-be publishers is turned down, the group will seek a licence from a foreign country, such as Cyprus, and print in Egypt, explained Habib. "We want to hit the newsstands by the beginning of next year," he added.

Police powers invoked against 'thugs'

As the police continue to round up thugs from Cairo's shantytowns, the Ministry of Justice is preparing new legislation providing harsher penalties. Gamal Essam El-Din reviews the situation

The Interior Ministry has invoked the Emergency Law during the past few weeks to round up as many as 300 suspected thugs who were allegedly terrorising residents in several shantytowns around Cairo and Giza. In the meantime, the Ministry of Justice is working on a new law which specifically penalises thuggery and provides harsher penalties for acts of violence.

Maj. Gen. Hosni El-Deeb, assistant to the interior minister and manager of the general security department, announced that police had launched several swoops on haphazard housing communities in Cairo and Giza, arresting 300 "thugs". Under the provisions of the Emergency Law, in force since President Anwar El-Sadat's assassination in 1981, the Interior Ministry is empowered to detain suspects for a 15-day period, at the end of which prosecution authorities will decide whether they should be released, El-Deeb said.

He added that the People's Assembly will discuss at its next parliamentary session a new bill aimed at regulating the activities of private security companies under the close supervision of the Interior Ministry. In the proposed bill, El-Deeb added, the Interior Ministry will be empowered to take action to ensure that private security companies operate within the limits of their licence and that they do not pose any threats to national security. These companies, he explained, are only licensed to secure buildings, not individuals. Besides, he added, they are neither authorised to provide bodyguards for the protection of businessmen and artists, which is the responsibility of the ministry, nor to conduct any investigations, keep individuals under surveillance or gather information about them. The draft law, said El-Deeb, also stipulates that these companies either take the form of joint-ventures or limited liability, with the majority of their shares to be held by Egyptians.

El-Deeb blamed the escalating problem of street crime on a mixture of socio-economic factors and on the negative impact of violence on television and in the cinema. According to Interior Ministry figures published this week, there are 21,000 known thugs on Cairo's police records, registered as "dangerous criminals."

Meanwhile, a Justice Ministry committee has almost finished drafting a new law to cope with the phenomenon. The committee has mainly focused on amending the Penal Code, particularly articles 89 and 243, with the objective of equating thuggery with terrorism. "Thuggery and terrorism are two faces of the same coin because both terrorise citizens, threaten their lives and undermine the sovereignty of the state," explained the committee's chairman, Mohamed Abdel-Aziz El-Guindi. He said the new law would penalise *thuggery as a felony*, rather than merely a misdemeanour, making it punishable by up to life imprisonment. The law defines thuggery as an assault on the lives or property of citizens, by using firearms, metal weapons, such as knives and chains, or dangerous chemicals, such as sulphuric acid.

And yet, Fathi Sorour, speaker of the People's Assembly, said last week he did not believe that a new law is necessary to face street thuggery. "We have an arsenal of legislation to confront crimes of violence and thuggery. The problem is a problem of education and ethics. It is also a problem of evolving fair solutions to citizens' problems and providing them with equal opportunity," Sorour said in a press interview.

A number of independent and opposition figures have expressed fear that the new legislation might be used by the government to curb civil liberties.

Kamal Khaled, a lawyer and former MP, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the new law would further increase the government's already sweeping powers, under the emergency law, to detain suspects without trial for long periods. "I think a clear-cut definition of thuggery should be made first before the law is submitted to the People's Assembly," Khaled said. "In the last few years, the government has arrested many citizens as suspected terrorists. It could use the new law to arrest political activists on the grounds that they hired thugs or that they are thugs themselves. This is why it is important for opposition parties to pressure the government to allow public discussion of the bill in the press and in opposition circles."

Raafat Seif, a leftist MP, attributed the proliferation of acts of thuggery to the shift in economic policies towards liberalisation and privatisation. "For me, taking hefty loans from banks without putting up adequate collateral, speculating on the stock market and illegally trading in state-owned land are all forms of thuggery," Seif said. "Thuggery should not only be associated with using force and violence, but also with using power to illicitly gain wealth. It is thuggery when a mediocre businessman hires thugs to achieve his ends. But it is also thuggery when a senior ruling party candidate hires street thugs during elections to appropriate a parliamentary seat for himself."

Ibrahim El-Nimiki, deputy chairman of parliament's Legislative Committee, expressed a different view. He argued that while the Penal Code, as it stands, deals with assault resulting in death or injury, it does not deal specifically with crimes of thuggery. "This is why it is necessary to amend the Penal Code to provide harsh penalties for thuggery, especially after acts of street violence have proved to be quite dangerous to the peace and security of society and to the government and the opposition alike," he said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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Voice of dissent

In Palestinian self-rule areas, Haidar Abdel-Shafi is referred to as the "conscience of the nation". Abdel-Shafi resigned from his post as head of the Palestinian negotiating team that started talks with Israel following the 1991 Middle East peace conference in Madrid when he discovered that the PLO was conducting secret negotiations that finally led to the Oslo agreements in 1993. Yet, he did not withdraw from public life. In his modest house in Gaza, reconciliation talks are taking place between Palestinian factions seeking a common ground. And although he is vehemently opposed to many of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's policies, Abdel-Shafi's views are treated with great respect and consideration.

Sherine Bahaa spoke to Abdel-Shafi to get his views on the present crisis in the peace process, particularly after the latest suicide bombings in West Jerusalem. Meanwhile, **Rasha Saad** spoke to Hamas spokesman in Gaza Mahmoud Zahar, also an influential figure in Palestinian politics.

Amid strong pressure from the United States and Israel on Arafat to clamp down hard on Hamas and Jihad, the Hamas spokesman ridiculed the possibility that the Islamic movement in Palestine could ever be weakened or terminated. That is not only because of Hamas' strength, but more importantly because Israel's detrimental policies attract more and more young Palestinians to the militant group, according to Zahar.



Palestinian children make victory signs and chant during a demonstration in front of the Red Cross offices in Gaza. The children are protesting the tight Israeli closure of the Palestinian self-rule areas in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel closed the self-rule areas following the latest suicide bombings in West Jerusalem two weeks ago. *(photo:Reuter)*

How would you describe the present status of the peace process following the *suicide bombings* in West Jerusalem two weeks ago?
The peace process died a long time ago. It died from its early beginnings when Israel violated the reference to UN Security Council Resolution 242 as a basis for the peace process. Israel abandoned the concept of peace and dishonoured the land-for-peace formula enshrined in Resolution 242. I believe that speeches about peace and how to protect it are mere pretensions.

So what do you think is the way out of the present deadlock?
I believe that the peace process has lost its credibility. That is why Palestinian officials have no alternative but to lay the blame on Israel's intransigent position and state their own conditions for a return to the negotiating table. Palestinians demand Israel's recognition of their right to self-determination and to an independent sovereign state in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in addition to the right of return for thousands of refugees as provided by the UN Security Council resolutions.

In spite of concrete obstacles planted on the ground by the Israelis to hinder the establishment of a state, the recognition of the Palestinian people's rights will stand as a base for true and serious negotiations. Without this recognition, things will deteriorate to an unacceptable level and thus we will be obliged to accept the status quo. However, I reiterate that Palestinians cannot give up their legitimate rights. In the end, we will fight to attain our objectives.

These words on the necessity of fighting were echoed by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Yasser Arafat in reaction to Israel's closure of the self-rule areas. Does this mean we are getting close to war?
War means preparations and capabilities. Speaking of war now is unrealistic.

How do you see the present relationship between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority? Do you think that the PA should crack down on Hamas militants or use them as a card in talks with Israel?
I ask all partners [in the peace process] to be committed to the path of democracy, to talk in order to reach decisions and be committed to them. In this difficult stage, there are various proposals from different partners like Hamas, the Authority and others.

I am against the crackdown by the Palestinian Authority on Hamas especially under the present deterioration in the peace process. We need all our resources to achieve our national goal.

What about the United States. What role is Washington playing in the present crisis?
The US is playing a really adverse role in the peace process. The US is biased and, therefore, has lost its credibility [in the eyes of the Palestinians] as the main sponsor of the whole process.

How would you describe Israel's recent actions and its threat to re-enter the self-ruled areas?
It is in the context of the Oslo agreements that the Israeli army can re-enter the self-rule areas. We are still under occupation and those who want to picture us as independent are lying. However, this does not mean that Israel's contentious policy should be accepted, but this is what was stated in Oslo.

Yet, I do not think that Israel will return to take over the territories they gave back to the Palestinians because Israel wanted to be rid of these territories once and for all.

The present crisis in the peace process coincides with the release of a report by the Palestinian Legislative Council making corruption charges against nearly all ministers in President Arafat's 18-member cabinet. What is the significance of this report?
I am a member of the Legislative Council and this report investigated what was already stated in an official auditor's report. A panel of nine legislators, appointed by the Council, scrutinised all aspects of the report and reached the conclusions that serious financial, legal and administrative violations had actually taken place. Consequently, the Palestinian Legislative Council gave Arafat time to dissolve his cabinet and appoint a new team.

For my part, I voted for the decision. It is obvious that once malpractices are discovered in the executive authorities, withdrawing confidence and finding more qualified and experienced ministers is the best solution.

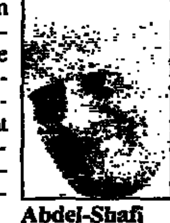
According to recent reports, more names are still to be announced in relation to the Council's recommendations on corruption. There were even questions about why Arafat was not included in this report. When will these questions be answered?
Unfortunately, the official auditor's report excluded the name of the head of the Palestinian Authority, his office and military officials. From the democratic point of view, the report of the general auditor should have included all official entities including the president's office.

What are the next steps to be taken in regard to the recommendations of the corruption report?
The recommendations of the Council are clear. Right now, another committee appointed by the head of the Palestinian Authority is looking into the Council's report. The point that has been made clear right now is that there is corruption in the Authority. Thus, more decisive measures should be undertaken such as taking those named in the report to court.

However, the main action is to dissolve the present cabinet and appoint more experienced and qualified ministers.

Corruption was not the only charge levelled against the PA. Local and international human rights groups have criticised the undemocratic practices of Arafat's many security bodies and their attempts to curb freedom of expression. How do you see the future of the democratic process in Palestine?
Up until now, there is nothing we can refer to as the democratic process in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian Legislative Council is the institution responsible for achieving democracy. For us, democracy means the supremacy of law, freedom of the press, the accountability of officials, among other things.

Even though the role of the Council has been sidelined by the Palestinian Authority, we are working hard to fulfil our role as legislators, knowing that solidarity and agreement among Palestinians is really crucial to our work.



Abdel-Shafi

The authenticity of the leaflets in which Hamas claimed responsibility for the latest suicide bombings in West Jerusalem were questioned by some Hamas leaders as well as other Palestinian officials. Does the ambiguity surrounding the last operation indicate a change in Hamas' tactics?
Hamas is a movement whose target is to resist occupation, not to show off. It is true, however, that we adapt our means of resistance to cope with the changes we face. Our resistance began with demonstrations, then developed into using stones, then bullets and then bombs.

Concerning the responsibility for the latest operation, we have nothing to add. [Zahar refused to claim or deny responsibility for the West Jerusalem market suicide bombings.]

Is the political leadership of Hamas forbidden from commenting on the latest suicide operation? And does this mean that the military wing is independent of the political leadership in making decisions?
The political leadership of Hamas has never commented on any of the movement's military actions.

As to the relationship between the military wing and the political leadership, I prefer not to use the word 'independent' because it gives the impression of separation. You can say that we believe in specialisation without overlapping. The military wing has its own role and specialisation and it independently speaks about its activities.

According to some views, the recent bombings have only complicated matters further and resulted in more Israeli hard-line policies. What do you think?
This is an Israeli and American view because we did not hear any complaint about what happened [the bombings] on the popular Palestinian level, whether official or unofficial.

More important, the closure policies are not the result of the Islamic struggle but of Israeli policies. For instance, last year, which was relatively calm, witnessed more closures than any other time.

Israel imposed the economic blockade long before the last two bombings. Israel has always sought to link the Palestinian economy to its own in an attempt to weaken the Palestinian Authority. Thus, the results of any bilateral negotiations will be influenced by this weakness.

Lately, Hamas has expressed its doubts about achieving peace especially after Israel's escalation of its settlement policy. What is the alternative in your view?
We have never thought that there would be peace with Israel in the first place. We know that Israel wants an agreement that guarantees the security of its borders and settlements rather than conceding Palestinian rights. From the beginning we have insisted that no one should negotiate unless we as Palestinians were in a powerful position.

Both sides have their fingers in each other's mouths, and both will bite until one of them screams. We did that before [during the Palestinian Intifada] and forced Israel to scream. That is why Israel pulled out from Gaza and the West Bank.

The alternative is to try by all means to resist the occupation.

Thousands of Palestinians marched recently in support of Hamas in Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah. To what extent is the popularity of Hamas increasing considering the deterioration in the peace process?
I cannot say exactly how much Hamas' popularity has increased. However, I can say that before the deterioration in the peace process there were three categories of people: those who support Hamas, those who support the Authority and those who are in between.

For a long time those in the middle represented the majority. They dreamt of Gaza as another Singapore. They thought that Palestinian prisoners would be freed and that border crossings would open.

Now things are clear for them. They have realised that they are being manipulated by Israel. They are also aware of the corruption in the Authority and the growing possibility that their national aspirations are being abandoned. They see all these failures in contrast to the unwavering policy of Hamas based on continuing resistance against occupation.

Arafat rejected the Israeli demand to crack down on Hamas militants. How do you assess such a position?
When all the Palestinian territories were under Israeli occupation, Israel exercised all the pressure it could to get rid of Hamas, including deporting 400 Hamas members to Marj Al-Zohour in Lebanon in 1993. Now Israel wants the Palestinian Authority to succeed where it failed.

The Palestinian Authority has also tried to break the movement and did more than what Israel had done to achieve that goal. The result was that it lost the sympathy of the ordinary Palestinian without being able to kill the spirit of resistance.

Hamas is not separate from the Palestinian people. It is very popular and is present in every Palestinian house, school and hospital.

If the PA cracks down on Hamas, there will be a civil war.

Meanwhile, Hamas knows that Israel seeks to turn the West Bank and Gaza into another Lebanon or Algeria so as to be the only winner. We will make sure that this does not happen.

What is your comment on news that linked two Hamas suspects to an alleged plan to bomb the New York subway?
Hamas has nothing to do with this plot or these two suspects. Moreover, one of the suspects, Lafi Khalil, is a well-known Israeli agent.

Khalil was uncovered by imprisoned Hamas members in 1993, and he admitted that he is an Israeli agent and that Israel wanted him to spy on Hamas members inside prison.

This is an Israeli conspiracy to discredit Hamas and to incite hatred against Hamas among the American people.



Zahar

Brothers meet in Damascus

While relations between Syria and Israel are at their lowest point, an Arab Israeli delegation ends its visit tomorrow after meeting President Hafez Al-Assad in a gesture of solidarity. Assad said Netanyahu wanted to stop the peace process. Atef Saqr reports from Damascus

Even though the invitation to the 44-member delegation of Arab Israeli figures was issued by Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, the Syrian government was clearly concerned not to give the rare visit any official tinge by emphasising that they were welcomed in Syria as Palestinians, and not as an official Israeli delegation.

But, according to observers, Damascus also aimed at delivering another message, marking a change in its policy towards the so-called "peace camp" in Israel.

The delegation included six members of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, representing the Arab, Labour and Meretz parties. They all support peace between Arabs and Israel on the basis of just solutions which guarantees the rights of both sides. One of the delegation members, Saleh Tarif, heads the Internal Affairs Committee at the Knesset and is close to Labour Party leader Ehud Barak. As a member of the Druze community living in Israel, Tarif has performed the compulsory military service in the Israeli army. Except for members of the Druze community, Palestinians who were forced to accept the Israeli nationality following the establishment of the state in 1948 are not allowed to join the Israeli army because their loyalty is considered suspect.

According to diplomatic sources, Damascus asked the delegation to travel aboard a regular passenger flight via Cairo and not on a private airplane despite their large number. At the airport, they were received by the governor of Damascus, Zoheir Al-Taghlobi, and not by Foreign Ministry officials.

The delegation, which also included prominent Palestinian writers and poets such as Sameeh Al-Qassem, had no official programme of meetings with Syrian parliament members or other officials. But informal meetings were held, mostly over lunch or dinner, including a meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa on Monday.

Tarif quoted Al-Sharaa as saying that Syria was still seeking peace despite the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. "The minister told us that he was optimistic despite the present circumstances, although he said there were no signs of hope under Netanyahu's government," Tarif told reporters after the meeting. Tarif also said he was carrying a message calling for the coordination of peace efforts from Israeli Labour Party leader Barak to the Syrian leadership but declined to give details.

The delegation met President Assad on Tuesday for nearly three hours. Tarif told reporters that he informed Assad that the Labour Party remained committed to reaching a peace agreement with Syria. Assad welcomed the gesture and accused Netanyahu of backtracking from all what was reached with the previous Labour government.

This was the second visit by an Arab Israeli delegation to Syria since 1948. The first took place in 1994 to offer Al-Assad condolences following the death of his son, Basil, in a car accident. Arab Israeli Knesset member Abdel-Karim Al-Darawshe led the small delegation at the time. He also participated in the latest visit and expressed his delight in coming back to Syria for a more extended stay.

Shortly before the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee their homes and villages to neighbouring Arab countries in fear of Israeli attacks and massacres. When the state was formed, the Labour-led government continued the scare tactics but granted those who remained the Israeli nationality. After the 1967 war and the occupation of the rest of Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli government could not apply the same tactics because of Arab and international opposition to another Palestinian mass exodus.

Thus, Palestinians living within the 1948 borders have been viewed with suspicion by many Arabs because they accepted the Israeli nationality. Representatives of the Palestinians living inside Israel have always denied allegations that they agreed to "cooperate with the enemy." They consider that they were forced to accept the Israeli nationality but that their loyalty has never been to the state of Israel. The majority of Palestinians expelled after 1948 went to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Thus, it was only natural that members of the visiting Arab Israeli delegation would find relatives in the many Palestinian refugee camps in Syria.

Most Arab countries and political groups changed the way they viewed Arab Israelis after the Palestinian Intifada broke out in 1987. Palestinians living in Israel strongly supported the uprising and helped their brothers in the West Bank and Gaza by providing them with food and medicine during Israeli closures of Palestinian territories.

The fact that consecutive Israeli governments discriminated against the Palestinians living within their borders in health, education and other services, never helped in bringing the two sides closer. An Islamic movement, which is not different in its goals from the militant Hamas and Jihad groups, has also gained popularity among Israel's Arabs and now plays an influential role in their day-to-day lives.

During its week-long visit to Damascus, the Arab Israeli delegation held several meetings with representatives of Palestinian groups based in Damascus who are vehemently opposed to the 1993 Oslo peace accords. Some of the delegates, including the poet Qassem, were given a hero's welcome at the Palestinian refugee camp of Al-Yarmouk, where many of the Palestinian opposition factions are based. "We are not Israeli Arabs or Arab Israelis. We are Arab Arabs and we do not like to be labelled otherwise. When we come to Syria, we visit brothers and not a foreign country," Qassem told reporters.

The head of the Arab Israeli delegation and mayor of the town of Shafa Amr in north Israel, Ibrahim Nemr Hussein, stated that the delegation had discussed with Assad the means of establishing comprehensive peace in the region according to UN resolutions. He added that the Arab delegation also tackled with Assad the strategy Arabs should follow in dealing with Netanyahu.

Abdel-Malek El-Dahamshe, a member of the Knesset who belongs to the Islamic movement, said that the Palestinians living inside Israel are "eager to visit all our brothers in the Arab world, including Iraq and Sudan, to strengthen ties between us."

Syria, for its part, was keen to convey to the Arab Israeli delegation the message that Syria was in a strong position and that it did not want to negotiate with Israel out of weakness. Walid Sadeq, a member of the delegation and a parliamentarian representing the Meretz Party, said that Syrian officials had also assured them that Damascus wanted a just peace and strongly supported Palestinians living inside Israel.

The delegation's visit was sharply criticised in the Israeli press, however. Israeli newspapers displayed the picture of Tarif laying a wreath on the Syrian unknown soldier's memorial. They also highlighted statements in which the delegation members expressed support for Assad and Syria despite Israel's official line that Damascus supports "terrorist" groups opposed to peace.

During one of the public rallies, as the delegation met with Palestinian refugees, a Palestinian child went to Dahamshe and told him that he wanted to go back home to Palestine. The Palestinian child added that his family had told him that his home town was Jaaona in what is now north Israel. Dahamshe wept as he told the child that his own town no longer exists and that an Israeli settlement has replaced it.

Civilian blood drowns April understanding

South Lebanon was the scene this week of the worst violence since Israel launched its "Grapes of Wrath" onslaught in April last year. Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

Fourteen Lebanese people, including seven civilians, were killed by bombs, Israeli shelling and rocket attacks this week in the worst escalation of violence since Israel carried out its major offensive against Lebanon in April 1996, code-named "Grapes of Wrath".

Also, for the first time since the April war, Katyusha rockets slammed into Kiryat Shemona in northern Israel, wounding an Israeli woman. But Lebanese officials downplayed the possibility of Israel carrying out an all-out reprisal attack.

Israel launched the April 1996 offensive after Hizbollah resistance guerrillas fired Katyushas into northern Israel in retaliation for the killing of a 13-year-old Lebanese boy by a roadside bomb in the southern village of Barasheet. Israel's 17-day offensive left more than 150 Lebanese civilians dead and scores wounded.

Hizbollah vowed to retaliate against the recent Lebanese civilian deaths but denied any responsibility for the Katyusha attacks on northern Israel. "If we carried out the attack we would declare responsibility," the movement's Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said. "But we will resume our attacks against northern Israel when the time is right because the April cease-fire understanding is not, so far, protecting civilians from Israeli attacks."

The understanding, reached after the April 1996 onslaught, bans attacks on and from civilian areas on both sides of the border but sanctions resistance operations against military targets.

The five-nation monitoring group, composed of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, the United States and France to observe the truce, met on Monday and Tuesday to discuss 12 complaints filed by Lebanon and Israel over alleged violations of the understanding over the past week.

Members of the Lebanese delegation said they did not expect that a statement clearly naming the party responsible for the latest escalation of violence would be made. The group's recommendations are expected to be announced this weekend. Any statement is likely to be worded to satisfy all parties in an attempt to contain the spiralling violence.

Lebanese and Hizbollah officials, meanwhile, blasted Israel for the mounting violence, but also blamed Palestinian groups based in Lebanon for the rocket attacks on north Israel.

"The resistance has never failed to take credit for its own actions. We are not behind the attack. [Palestinian President Yasser] Arafat is responsible," Sheikh Mohamed Yazbek, Hizbollah's official in Baalbek told the *Weekly*. "Israel is facing internal problems and a crisis with the Palestinians. It wants to divert attention from its home front to Lebanon."

Israeli warplanes recently raided bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the hills of Neemeh, some 15 kilometres south of Beirut. This fuelled speculation that Palestinian guerrillas had launched the Katyushas. But Israel maintained the rockets were fired from areas under Hizbollah control.

"What Israel is trying to do is scrap the [April] understanding. And that is why it is escalating the tension and targeting civilians," Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz said.

Six Hizbollah resistance fighters were killed in Israeli attacks in less than a week. On Monday, Israeli commandos killed five fighters including two local commanders with a roadside bomb in the Lebanese village of Kfour, northwest of Nabatiya and outside Israel's occupied zone in south Lebanon. The sixth guerrilla was killed in an Israeli air raid on a training camp close to the Lebanese-Syrian border in the Bekaa Valley.



Lebanese women cry at the funeral of a woman who was killed along with their two children in the explosion of a roadside bomb in a village inside the Israel occupied border zone in south Lebanon. This week witnessed the worst escalation of violence in south Lebanon since April 1996, when Israel launched its major offensive code-named "Grapes of Wrath." *(photo: AFP)*

Hizbollah threatened to retaliate for the commando operation, describing it as a flagrant violation of the April understanding.

"Israel will witness more explosions and suicide bombings inside Palestine and inside occupied land [in south Lebanon]," Hizbollah's Deputy Secretary-General Naem Qassem told a crowd of several thousand attending the funeral of the fighters killed by the Israeli roadside bomb.

Over the past week there has also been a series of roadside bombings in the so-called "security zone" that claimed the lives of civilians. Israel blamed the attacks on Hizbollah but the resistance movement said they were carried out by Israel in order to incite tension in the occupied security zone and cause a rift between the resistance and the residents there.

The recent flare-up was downplayed by Lebanese government officials. "The escalation is normal. Since 1978, the south has always been unstable," Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri told a joint news conference held with visiting Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri last week. "Lebanon wants to live in peace. The only solution is for Israel to implement UN Resolution 425 which calls on it to unconditionally withdraw from Lebanese territories."

Hizbollah sources told the *Weekly* it was unlikely Israel would carry out another "Grapes of Wrath" operation. "There won't be an attack now. [US Secretary of State Madeleine] Albright is coming to the region and there are contacts to ease the tension," they said.

But the UN was more cautious. "I hope the parties realise that if the situation is not controlled. I am afraid we will have a very unhappy situation in south Lebanon," Timor Goksel, spokesman for the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon (UNIFIL), told the *Weekly*. "The major concern is the number of Lebanese civilian casualties. Without blaming anyone, from our past experience, when casualty figures increase it is a sure way to escalate the situation and it is very dangerous for the south.

Arafat's Lebanese front

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Lebanese officials are embroiled in a war of words over who is responsible for the latest suicide bombings in West Jerusalem. Graham Usher reports from Jerusalem

During an interview with CNN on 9 August, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat pointed out that a Hamas leaflet issued after the recent suicide bombings in Jerusalem contained a call for the release from prison of Hizbollah cleric Sheikh Abdel-Karim Obeid, abducted by the Israelis from Lebanon in 1989.

The authenticity of the leaflet has been questioned by both Israel and certain Hamas leaders. This, however, did not dissuade Arafat from making a gratuitous link between Hizbollah and the Jerusalem bombings. "What is the relation of Hizbollah with this terrorist activity unless they were behind it or they knew [about] it or they facilitated it?" he asked.

Two weeks after the attacks in Jerusalem, neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been able to identify the bombers, fueling speculation that they came from abroad. This is a line of inquiry that has been pursued eagerly by the PA leadership, with the added spin that the "Iranian-backed" Hizbollah rather than the "Palestinian" Hamas are the prime suspects. On 9 August, Palestinian chief negotiator Nabil Shaath said the explosives used in the Jerusalem bombing matched those discovered on Hussein Makdad, a Shi'ite Lebanese with Hizbollah connections who Israel alleges blew himself up while making a bomb in an East Jerusalem hotel last year.

Few Israeli commentators took the allegation seriously, either then or now. Had Hizbollah really been behind Makdad, they say, the Israeli government would have used it as propaganda in its war against the Islamists and used it to justify retaliatory strikes against Hizbollah bases in Lebanon. Israel did neither, preferring to let the strange case of Makdad and his possible links with Hizbollah sink without trace. Furthermore, in 15 years of resistance against Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, Hizbollah has never once used suicide bombings against civilians inside Israel. This, according to Israeli analyst Israel Shahak, is what defines Hizbollah "as an authentic guerrilla movement as opposed to a terrorist group".

It is difficult to view Arafat's accusations as anything other than a decoy to shift attention to Lebanon, rather than the PA-controlled areas, as the point of origin of the suicide bombers. This is unlikely to cut much ice with the Israeli government, which, despite the lack of proof, remains convinced that the bombers came from the Occupied Territories and were at least abetted by either Hamas or Islamic Jihad. More irresponsibly, such charges can only sour further the already poisoned relations between the PLO, on the one side, and Hizbollah and the Lebanese government on the other.

Referring to Arafat's remarks on CNN, a Hizbollah statement described them as "a clear indication that Arafat is justifying Zionist crimes against our people and that he and his authority have become a tool in the service of Zionist terrorism". Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri also implied that pro-Arafat factions in the PLO were behind the recent Katyusha attacks on Kiryat Shomona in north Israel. "Arafat declares peace on one side and his men shell on the other side," he said after a meeting with Syria's President Assad on 10 August. "Arafat knows very well that Lebanon has suffered much and still suffers to defend the Palestinian cause. The Israelis hold him [Arafat] responsible for their security. He responds by saying that they [Hamas bombers] came from another country," Hariri added.

The main victims of this vitriol are likely to be the 350,000 Palestinian refugees who reside in Lebanon. Due to Arafat's allegations, they now face the added suspicion of Hizbollah, the one movement in Lebanon that has sided with their cause if not with their leadership in recent years.

For his part, Arafat's spokesman Marwan Kanafani denied Hariri's allegation that Palestinians were involved in shelling north Israel. "This accusation is not true because the Palestinian activity in Lebanon has been limited on orders of the Palestinian leadership and could not run against the policies of the Lebanese government," he told reporters. "Arafat feels saddened by the campaign against him in Lebanon, especially at a time when we need a unified Arab and Islamic position against the war waged by Israel on the Palestinian nation," he added.

Hussein keeps channels with Israel open

Intensive contacts between Jordan and Israel during the past two weeks peaked in a meeting yesterday between King Hussein and Netanyahu. Lola Keilani reports from Amman on the Jordanian government's determination to keep channels with Israel open, despite opposition at home

Since peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians were suspended in March following Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's decision to build a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, Jordan has intensified its efforts, together with Egypt, to bring the two parties back to the negotiating table.

According to Jordanian officials, those efforts were about to bear fruit until the suicide bombings in West Jerusalem two weeks ago left 13 Israelis dead and 170 people injured and the peace initiative in ruins.

The incident forced Jordanian and Egyptian officials to adopt a more urgent priority than the resumption of peace talks in their discussions with Israel. The immediate task was to ask Netanyahu's hard-line government to ease its collective punishment measures against Palestinians living in the self-rule areas.

Besides regular communication with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, King Hussein is keen to maintain contact with the Likud government, despite strong opposition from the Muslim Brotherhood and other leftist parties.

A week prior to yesterday's meeting between Hussein and Netanyahu, Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan met the Israeli premier to discuss attempts to revive the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. King Hussein also regularly receives members of the Israeli opposition Labour Party, including party leader Ehud Barak, and meets nearly all Israeli delegations visiting Amman. The meetings aim to make it clear that Arabs are as committed as ever to the peace process.

Jordanian Information Minister Samir Mutawaa warned, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, that the region will deteriorate into a cycle of mass violence if the main protagonists fail to get together and save the peace process.

"The earlier period of high-level consultations (with Israel and the Palestinians) was very fruitful. What is required now is an intensive effort to salvage the peace process," Mutawaa said.

He added that Jordan, in its recent contact with the Israeli government, attempted to introduce a new element in the continuing efforts to salvage the situation.

"We intervened to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people after the Jerusalem incident and are helping both parties to reach a settlement over their basic priorities such as the Jerusalem issue, refugees and borders," said the minister. Mutawaa added that Jordan's latest efforts were closely coordinated with "our brothers in Egypt."

In earlier statements, Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan said that Amman's mediation to rescue the peace process aimed "to contain the current crisis and prevent those who would limit the peace process to a narrow definition of security from achieving their goal."

Prince Hassan stressed that the security dimension is only part of the peace process and reiterated Jordan's unequivocal belief that "there can be no security without peace just as there can be no peace without security."

Prince Hassan said the current crisis was a turning point in the peace talks.

He expressed satisfaction that bridges and routes between Jordan and the West Bank had been reopened following their closure after the recent suicide bombings and that the movement of food and medicine had been allowed, in the wake of his talks with the Israeli prime minister last week.

During the one-hour closed meeting between the prince and the Israeli premier, Netanyahu was reportedly receptive to the idea of reducing punitive measures against the Palestinian people following the West Jerusalem market explosion.

Nevertheless Netanyahu seemed as persistent as ever in his hard-line policy towards the Palestinian Authority (PA), reiterating over and over again that the PA will have to fight terrorism before expecting him to consider the resumption of talks or carrying out Israel's obligations as stated in the 1993 Oslo Accords.

A senior Jordanian official told the *Weekly* that Amman's concern to maintain an open channel with Israel stemmed from its belief that peace was a strategic option. "We have to build on what was achieved under the previous Labour government while realising that we have no other option but to attempt to reach peace in the region," the official said.

"Maybe no progress can be achieved as long as the present Likud government is in office. But we must work hard not to kill the peace process as a whole. Hopefully, the present Israeli government will also reach the same conclusion one day after they become certain that there is no alternative to peace with the Arabs," he added.

Several Arab countries, particularly Syria, are critical of Jordan's approach to the peace process and relations with Israel. Damascus wants Amman to support its efforts to restore a total Arab boycott of Israel in order to force Netanyahu to resume peace talks on the basis of exchanging land for peace. As long as there is no progress in this direction, Arab countries, according to Syria, should not participate in any regional cooperation meetings to show Israel that there will be no normalisation of relations until it withdraws from all Arab territories occupied in 1967.

One major area of disagreement between Jordan and Syria concerns Arab participation in the fourth Middle and North Africa Economic Conference which is due to open in Doha, Qatar, in November. Jordanian Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh told reporters in recent statements that his country will take part in the Doha conference because it was a positive regional cooperation meeting. Syria, on the other hand, has been lobbying Arab countries to boycott the conference.

Tarawneh admitted that Syrian-Jordanian relations were not at their best now but said that the "Syrian brothers have their own way of looking at things and it is no secret that this view is different from that we hold in Jordan."

Musical chairs, Bashir-style

New governors are to be elected soon in Sudan's 26 states in a vain attempt to win the hearts and minds of the southern Sudanese, writes Gamal Nkrumah

Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, after his meeting with South African President Nelson Mandela in Pretoria on Tuesday, reiterated his call for a ceasefire with the main opposition movement in south Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by John Garang. "We support the call of President Mandela for a ceasefire with the SPLA," Bashir said. But, he refused to be drawn on whether he will directly meet with Garang in the near future.

Bashir's peace offer has been rejected before by Garang, who wants to see a total reorganisation of the Sudanese political system. This system is not about to change as Bashir is trying give a veneer of respectability by electing new governors for Sudan's 26 states.

The governor of the state of Khartoum, Majzoub Khalifa, is the only governor of who will remain in office because he was elected by a government-appointed legislative council. Khalifa is a staunch backer of the Islamisation policies pursued by the ruling clique. He is a hard-liner and has led several heavy-handed campaigns to pacify the two million refugees sheltering in Khartoum after fleeing the war in the south of the country. Khalifa has also clamped down hard on anti-government forces in the army, labour unions, universities and civil service.

Bashir, who has ruled by decree since he usurped power in a military coup in 1989, will preside over the selection process. Bashir will nominate three potential candidates for each of the 15 northern states from whom the local legislative council will then select a governor. State legislative councils of the northern half of the country are scheduled to meet today to select these new governors.

In the 10 southern states, the nomination of the governors will be made personally at a later date by Riak Machar, a former southern Sudanese renegade commander who signed a peace agreement with the government last April. Machar led a splinter from SPLA and formed his own South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF) which includes six smaller southern Sudanese factions.

It is widely expected that Machar will choose people who have a proven track record of hostility to Garang, whose troops continue to launch offensives against the Sudanese regular army. Machar harbours a long-standing personal animosity towards Garang and has long been a thorn in the flesh of the SPLA. Machar's troops have been marauding pro-SPLA settlements with the Sudanese army in recent months.

The Bashir regime deliberately provokes splits in the ranks of the SPLA and plays on ethnic divisions and tribal rivalries in southern Sudan. Machar, an ethnic Nuer, hopes to present himself as a champion of the rights of all southern Sudanese. But most observers believe Garang, an ethnic Dinka, is more popular than Machar. The Dinka, divided into rival tribes and clans, are by far southern Sudan's largest ethnic group.

The Sudanese political system, since Bashir's military take-over, is patterned on the Libyan model, that is, based on the formation of so-called citizens' committees and councils. In Sudan, these committees are dominated by the supporters of the National Islamic Front (NIF) led by Sudanese Parliament speaker, Hassan Al-Turabi. The Sudanese citizens' committees and councils, like their Libyan counterparts, dominate political discussion and, theoretically at least, are the main decision-making bodies in the country at the local, state, regional and national levels. There is one major difference between Tripoli and Khartoum, however. In Libya, Muammar Gaddafi always has the last word, but in Sudan, the presidential powers of Al-Bashir are tempered by those of Al-Turabi.

Partly in response to international pressure and to the growing strength of the Sudanese opposition forces, the government is trying to placate southerners and make a show of instituting democratic reforms. Once hand-picked by Machar, the governors of the 10 southern states will join the former rebel leader in the newly-formed Southern Sudanese Coordination Council (SSCC) made up of southerners who hate or fear Garang.

Last Thursday, Machar was named head of the SSCC and, according to the peace treaty signed in April, the government promised to have a referendum in four years' time to determine whether southerners want to be part of a united Sudan or become independent. Garang and his allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), grouping southern and northern opposition forces, rejected the government's promises as false. They also dismissed the SSCC and the peace treaty as a sham.

Last month, Bashir also appointed a panel, composed mainly of NIF members and supporters, to draft a new and permanent constitution to replace the interim one in force since independence in 1956. Presidential Adviser for Legal Affairs Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Taher, Minister of Federal Government Ali Al-Hajj and Turabi, an Oxford and Sorbonne-educated legal expert himself, are the guiding forces behind the panel.

While President Bashir continues his attempts to put an end to the war in Sudan, many believe that the fighting that has been going on since 1983 is essentially about the distribution of the national cake. The SPLA argues that successive Sudanese governments have not been fair at distributing the wealth of the country. The SPLA also says that income differentials have widened considerably since Bashir came to power.

The Sudanese government, once reliant on foreign aid for almost half its budget, is now starved of foreign funds because of an international embargo and the hostility of the West towards Khartoum's Islamist government. The deplorable state of the country's infrastructure and educational and health services constitutes a perennial barrier to social and economic development.



Opposition demonstrators in Uhuru Park in the centre of the Kenyan capital Nairobi, after being hit by police. The Kenyan government's handling of the demonstrations drew protests from the Western diplomatic missions in Nairobi. Britain, the former colonial power, said that it was reviewing aid to Kenya and last week the International Monetary Fund suspended a programme of major financial support to the Nile Basin nation. Kenya is the economic powerhouse of East Africa, and any disruption of the Kenyan economy will negatively impact the entire region. In the worst incident of violent demonstrations a month ago, 15 people were killed *(photo: AFP)*

No swing in the Sri Lankan pendulum

Eqbal Ahmad, writing for the second week on Sri Lanka, asks if the end of the island nation's civil war is in sight

In a decade and a half of ethnic warfare, the prospect for peace never seemed better than in November 1994 when Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected president with an unprecedented 62 per cent of the vote. A left-of-centre politician of progressive outlook, she appeared serious about making peace and to get there she seemed willing to meet her opponent half-way. She is reported to have made preliminary contacts with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) prior to her election. A cease-fire came into effect soon thereafter.

The cease-fire lasted 103 days. On 19 April 1995, the Tigers broke it without notice or explanation when they sank a ship in Trincomalee harbour and, a week later, shot down two Sri Lankan Air Force Avro jets. War resumed.

Since then, President Kumaratunga has pursued war more vigorously than she could pursue peace. For nearly two years now, Sri Lanka's army has been on the offensive and, in conventional terms, it has been winning. It now holds Jaffna and most towns in the peninsula and eastern regions. The LTTE, not quite on the run, has nevertheless been deprived of the territorial control it exercised for more than a decade. Yet, it remains a lethal organisation, disciplined, tightly organised and capable of striking hard as exemplified recently by the dramatic assassinations of two parliamentarians — Arunachelam Thangathurai, a Tamil, and Mohamed Maharoof, a Muslim.

The LTTE has not lost, but the government cannot quite win the war either. In this sort of warfare, the guerrillas often win when they do not lose and the government loses if it does not win politically, that is, if it does not accommodate the aspirations behind an insurgency.

In short, here is my assessment of the Sri Lankan conflict and it is necessarily tentative. Firstly, the two sides in the conflict have reached an unproductive stalemate which cannot be broken by military means. Politics have absolute primacy in such situations. The sooner the two sides find common grounds for a peace settlement, the better for the Tamil and Sinhalese peoples of the island country. Secondly, the responsibility and initiative for seeking a political settlement lies with the government. Thirdly, LTTE leaders will be wise to study the historic junctures in which a lack of flexibility caused highly organised and disciplined movements, not quite to be defeated, but to dwindle to nothing over time. Fourthly, government leaders need remember that while the fortunes of an armed movement may fluctuate, the grievances it articulates remain to haunt the state and society.

The government's material gains have been considerable in the last two years and the LTTE's losses have been proportional to the government's gains. The LTTE used to have three sources of funding — India, Sri Lankan Tamils abroad, many of whom emigrated after the 1983 riots, and revenue from taxes it collected in rebel-controlled areas, especially in Jaffna. Some observers also ascribe control of coastal smuggling as a source of income. However, all but the expatriate contributions have been reduced to a trickle. Indian aid virtually ended in July 1987 when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed an accord with the government of Sri Lanka and mounted an Indian military intervention against the LTTE. The LTTE retaliated by sending a female suicide bomber to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May 1991.

In the Jaffna peninsula, where the LTTE controlled a quasi-state, it had developed an elaborate and efficient system of collecting taxes on vehicles, entry-exit and import-export. Today, the government holds Jaffna city and administers an estimated 430,000 people out of the peninsula's population. The LTTE, for its part, has direct control over areas that encompass some 150,000 people. As most armed movements do, it too must be able to collect taxes in government-held areas but it has undoubtedly lost its most lucrative source of funding. Similarly, in the eastern districts, LTTE's political and military presence remains significant but observers believe that the organisational links between the north and east have been weakened.

Journalists and scholars I spoke to say that time has taken its toll on the number of LTTE members. At its height, it had some 14,000 armed fighters. Today, the estimates range between 8,000 and 8,500, of which about 7,000 are on the northern mainland. This is not a negligible guerrilla force. In fact, a motivated guerrilla force of this size, if it is reasonably armed and enjoys popular sympathy, can tie down an army of 150,000. The Sri Lankan government's forces in combat zones are not quite half that size and its soldiers are coddled like cubs in a zoo.

LTTE's most serious military problem may be the migration of Sri Lankan Tamils from the north and east as this reduces their recruitment pool. Some half a million people, at least half of them young adults, are estimated to have left the Tamil-dominated regions of Sri Lanka in the last decade. There is evidence to suggest that the number of young people between 14-16 and of women in LTTE ranks has been increasing. It is notable that I did not hear reports of a significant increase in defections from their ranks.

Even cumulatively, these are not decisive indicators. Politically vital and organisationally dynamic armed movements have survived in worse circumstances and gone on to achieve their objectives. Algeria and Cuba are historic examples. For, political, not military factors, are ultimately decisive in revolutionary warfare. It is in this area that lie the crucial weaknesses of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and its constituent organisations. They were militarised and fighting, killing and dying took precedence over the harder tasks of educating, organising and administering viable political communities.

Politics became with them the function of power; patronage and philanthropy was confused with the creation of parallel hierarchies a network of services which renders the state useless to the people. Strategic thought and planning surrendered to tactical instincts. Invariably, militarism promotes triumphalism; one ceases to calculate risks and losses until, that is, things have gone too far.

From talking with knowledgeable people in Sri Lanka and from reading what little is available on the LTTE, I learned very little about the linkages it has made between ideology and organisation, political and military activities and structures, between administration and armed fighting, and between consent and coercion. It has developed an obviously effective and hardy military organisation, an infrastructure for collecting taxes and insuring security, and a cadre of motivated and brave fighters. These are important strengths when things are going well and the adversary does not measure up, but they are not sufficient for sustaining a movement through long, hard times. But even if the LTTE is politically deficient — my evidence in this regard is inconclusive — one political factor remains favourable and that is the alienation of Sri Lankan Tamils from the state and the sectarian forces which are identified with it. To overcome this alienation is Sri Lanka's primary challenge.

The government of Chandrika Kumaratunga appears at the same time to be committed and unable to take the necessary steps towards peace. As elsewhere in South Asia, the Sri Lankan state is much too centralised to serve the common good. Centralised states are uniquely unsuited to pluralistic societies. They are ideal instruments of special interests and prone to alienate those with lesser access to the state apparatus. Devolution of power is essential to insuring a sense of empowerment and citizens' participation. Thoughtfully designed plans of decentralisation are essential to defusing social conflicts and the political deterioration which invariably result from the exercise of centralised power. Typically, as in Pakistan with the creation of the One Unit structure in 1955, ruling elites respond to political pressure for power distribution with greater centralisation. This is precisely what J.R. Jayewardene did in 1982 when, by a referendum, he changed Sri Lanka's parliamentary political system into an even more centralised presidential one. Predictably, the simmering ethnic discontent was vastly accentuated.

Chandrika Kumaratunga is publicly committed to reversing this legacy. In January 1996, her government released the "Draft Provisions of the Constitution Containing the Proposal of the Government of Sri Lanka Relating to Devolution of Power." Space does not permit an analysis of this not-quite-complete draft. However, one might note that it reveals the constraints under which the Kumaratunga government currently functions. The January draft appears to weaken the provisions of regional autonomy contained in an earlier draft of which some provisions were made public piecemeal beginning in August 1995. The draft not only retains but also fortifies Buddhism's exalted constitutional status which makes Sri Lanka a pseudo-theocracy like Pakistan. The checks on the central government's power to intervene in regional governance appear seriously inadequate. In brief, the draft kowtows far too much to majority preferences to truly appeal to a deeply alienated minority.

The inadequacies of the devolution proposal reflect the difficulties Kumaratunga faces vis-à-vis the Buddhist religious establishment and her parliamentary opposition. The religious establishment has a powerful presence among the Sinhalese majority. Its antipathy to Tamils and Hinduism is as rooted as are its links with Sinhalese nationalism. Furthermore, the president commands but a thin majority in the parliament. Considering the ambiguities and defects of the devolution proposal, the referendum on constitutional reforms, scheduled for October 1997, may not win majority approval. It will certainly be opposed and rejected by Vellupilai Parbhakaran, the hard-line leader of the LTTE.

So an end to ethnic warfare in Sri Lanka is not yet in sight. Neither is the emergence of a Tamil Eelam (Tamil Homeland) on the island. The prospects are for continued violence, probably at a lower level of intensity than it has been in the last decade, however. It is likely that economic forces rather than political wisdom will eventually bring Sri Lanka to peace with itself.

A snag in Slavic union

Abdel-Malik Khalil, in Moscow, spells out the problems that beset plans for Russian-Belorussian political and economic integration

At the end of May, a long-awaited treaty designed to bind Belarus and Russia more closely together was ratified. However, both the Russian media and the political establishment are now concerned with numerous problems that are plaguing the practical application of the plans. And the recent arrest of two media workers in Belarus, in breach of guarantees of press freedom contained in the treaty, has led to an escalation of tension.

The Russian-Belarus Union Treaty was ready for signing on 2 April. However, Russian moderate and liberal politicians feared the influence of hard-line Belorussian President Alexander Lukashenko could disrupt Russia's radical political and economic liberalisation programmes and the date for signing was delayed for weeks.

The fiercely anti-Western Lukashenko has been critical of the pace of Russian reform and is an advocate of a return to greater state control of economic affairs. But despite fears of Lukashenko's designs to derail Russia's deregulation programme, Russian President Boris Yeltsin finally decided the benefits of closer union between the two Slavic countries outweighed the drawbacks and went ahead with the treaty.

Under the treaty Russia will not have to dismantle its military installations and withdraw its troops — which have been stationed there since Soviet times — out of Belarus. Russia's continued military presence in Belarus might act as a psychological counterweight to the eastward expansion of NATO. The former Soviet allies of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO recently and Russia is keen to stop the erosion of its power in what was formerly a buffer zone between it and the West.

Economic considerations also influenced the decision to sign the treaty. A gas pipeline originating deep inside Russian territory runs through Belarus and ends in Western Europe. Russia was keen to let the pipeline pass through Belarus rather than to go through Ukraine — which is regarded as anti-Russian. Russia will exercise tighter control over the pipeline now that it runs through Belarus.

Under the treaty, Russians and Belorussians, whose languages are mutually intelligible and who share a common Slavic culture, will be able to obtain free education and medical care in both countries. Most Belorussians speak Russian, either as a first or second language, and the educational systems in both countries are very similar. Treaty guidelines stipulate that social services in the two countries are also to be coordinated.

A string of national disappointments in both Russia and Belarus since the collapse of the former Soviet Union has brought the peoples of the two countries closer together. Russia has suffered one political and economic setback after another, and the Belorussian economy is a shambles.

Belorussians had hoped that the treaty would create the necessary conditions for attracting Russian and foreign capital. But, so far, very little capital has trickled into the battered Belorussian economy, which suffers from an inflated Soviet-era heavy industrial sector. The unemployment rate in Belarus stands at over 20 per cent.

What alarms many Russians is the fact that Belorussian President Lukashenko's style of government is authoritarian and smacks of the old Soviet style of leadership. It is for this reason that a clause was inserted in the union treaty that guarantees the freedom of the media, securing the rights of opposition political parties and political association in both countries.

Nevertheless, Lukashenko has already flaunted this particular clause several times in the past few months. His complete disregard for the political opposition's rights to participate in the decision-making process has drawn fire from several Russian, European and international human rights groups. Lukashenko has also clamped down on Belorussian human rights activists and curtailed press freedom.

Correspondent Pavel Sheremet and cameraman Dmitri Zavadsky are two Belorussian media workers who were employed by the Russian television station ORT. On 26 July they were arrested near the Belarus-Lithuanian border while filming a documentary on the poorly-guarded Belorussian borders. Lukashenko accused Sheremet of being a paid agent of Western intelligence services. The Russian president was forced to intervene on Sheremet's behalf because of the stipulations of the union treaty. The incident threatens to harm relations between Minsk and Moscow.

"It is impossible that the future of the union between Russia and Belarus be put in doubt because of the banal provocation by one man [ORT correspondent Sheremet] seeking celebrity status at any cost," Lukashenko said indignantly. But Governor Leonid Gorbenko of the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad recently sent Lukashenko a telegram asking the Belorussian president to postpone his planned visit because of local concerns over the arrest of the ORT journalists.

Yeltsin's half-hearted attempt to admonish Lukashenko has so far brought no end to the media workers' plight. Yeltsin recently said, "Lukashenko is young and quick-tempered and not so good at dealing with criticism."

Belorussian sovereignty is also a touchy subject for the two countries. Many Belorussians, who have suffered Russian cultural and political hegemony in the past, fear that Belorussians will lose their hard-won independence and be overwhelmed by the "Russian giant". Russia has a population of 160 million while Belarus has just 10 million people, and while Russia has enormous economic potential with vast mineral and agricultural wealth, Belarus lacks abundant natural resources.

Before signing the treaty Lukashenko made it clear in numerous public statements that, "Belarus will never be a Russian province." Lukashenko also stressed that there will be no talk of further integration without guarantees of complete Belorussian sovereignty.

There is no love lost between Lukashenko and Russia's First Vice-Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais. When Yeltsin publicly scolded Lukashenko, the Belorussian president retorted that Yeltsin must have been misled by some of his close associates — a veiled reference to Chubais. "I will provide explanations to Yeltsin only after he gives me an explanation for the war the Russian media is waging against me," Lukashenko told reporters in the Belorussian capital Minsk.

Lukashenko is walking a tightrope: he needs Russia desperately, but his distaste for Russia's political liberalisation and economic deregulation programmes has earned him the enmity of many Russians. The dissolution of plans for further integration between Russia and Belarus would be political suicide for Lukashenko.

Is cohabitation workable?

The French left, locked in uncomfortable cohabitation with French President Jacques Chirac, is faced with hard choices, writes **Hosny Abdel-Reheem**

The current cohabitation in France between the right-wing, represented in President Chirac, and the left-wing, represented in the National Assembly and Lionel Jospin's government, is inherently unstable. It was this instability that Chirac tried to forestall by dissolving the National Assembly, but his gimmick backfired.

Even before the recent parliamentary elections, a number of the state councillors, headed by Jack Attali, were debating amendments to the French Constitution designed to avert political paralysis at a time when the country has to make strategic decisions concerning the European monetary union and the restructuring of NATO.

The Constitution of the Fifth Republic places the nation's foreign policy and defence directly under the presidency. The Constitution, tailored to suit the governing style of General Charles De Gaulle, was designed to keep sovereign state institutions above the reach of party bickering.

The Gaullists defended French interests on the international level vis-à-vis the two Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. However, since the 1968 strikes, which undermined the belief in a national consensus, this nationalistic world view suffered a crisis.

When Socialist President François Mitterrand came to power in 1981, he dealt decisively with the first instance of right-wing cohabitation. He dissolved the right-wing National Assembly and asked the French electorate to back a Socialist majority in order to enable him to govern. He got what he wanted. But two years before the end of Mitterrand's second term of office, a right-wing National Assembly majority was again elected, resulting in a second cohabitation. But the 1993-95 cohabitation turned into a historical footnote, not least because Mitterrand himself abandoned the Socialist forces that had won him the presidency.

The third cohabitation, which began two months ago, is a more complicated case. The powerful social movement that brought the left to power is unprepared to let its elected representatives abandon their electoral promises.

The clash between French foreign policy priorities and domestic concerns is all too obvious. Commitment to a single European currency subject to the Maastricht Treaty necessitates the reduction of the state budget deficit to 3 per cent of GNP. This entails slashing public spending on education, health care, and unemployment benefits. When former French Premier Alain Juppé attempted to implement such a policy, his right-wing government was driven out of office.

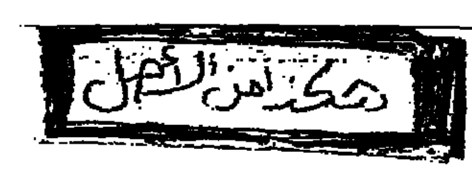
Because of the Maastricht Treaty, French foreign policy has become entangled in domestic matters. The burning issue now is who should decide the foreign policy: the recently-elected Socialist majority or President Chirac?

President Chirac's recent Middle East initiative failed to win the backing of Premier Lionel Jospin. This could be just one episode in an ongoing rivalry between the presidency and the Socialist government. The Chirac-Jospin cohabitation is supposed to continue until 2002, but it is already cracking at the seams.

Many right-wing conservatives urge the formation of a new coalition, incorporating the extreme right of Jean-Marie Le Pen, in order to defeat the Socialist left. They cite the example of the alliance between the Socialist and Communist parties which allowed the left-wing socialists to reach power.

Two months have elapsed since the Socialist-Communist coalition government came to power. Despite its Socialist rhetoric, the government's liberal policies have so far borne more than a passing resemblance to those of its rightist rivals. The government promises to legalise the residence of illegal immigrants and reopen discussions over the privatisation of public projects, but these promises can cost it dearly. If it fulfills these promises it will jeopardise France's EU commitments. If it does not, a grassroots backlash could break the ranks of the French left. The right would be delighted.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



Chicken measure irks local producers

A government decision to revoke a ban on imported poultry has left local producers squawking, reports **Niveen Wahish**

Government plans to revoke a ban on imported poultry have been in the works since 1995. But when the Ministry of Supply and Trade decided to follow through on this commitment, stipulated under an agreement signed with the World Trade Organisation to lift restrictions on imports, domestic poultry producers were less than pleased.

The government was unable to lift the ban, which had been in effect for more than 10 years, until the completion of certain procedures, such as setting down specifications and standards according to which frozen chickens would be allowed into the country. Officials also put off the move pending the establishment of a specialised authority charged with looking into dumping complaints.

As a result, the ban was revoked only in the second half of last month by the Ministry of Supply and Trade. The government, however, put in motion several guarantees aimed at protecting the domestic poultry industry from increased competition resulting from imported frozen chicken.

First, officials set a customs duty of 80 per cent on imported poultry — the maximum tariff that a country may levy upon lifting a ban that may affect fledgling domestic industries. The tariff will be gradually reduced by 2.4 per cent every year.

The tariff will be applied on the minimum price of $1.600 per ton — a figure set by the United States Department of Agriculture as the price of frozen poultry in the US. Importers, consequently, will pay about $1.200 in taxes for each ton of frozen chickens brought into Egypt.

The aim of this measure, says Abdel-Aziz Salem, chairman of El-Sharqiya Poultry Company, is to protect local producers and consumers from unscrupulous importers who may attempt to bring in cheaper, low-quality goods, or who may doctor their invoices to make it seem that they paid more than they actually had in order to pay less duties.

Under these guidelines, explained Salem, imported chickens will retail for LE9.5 apiece, including the cost of shipping and the importer's profit margin. Their domestically-raised counterparts retail at between LE6.5 to LE8, depending on weight.

"At this price, imported chickens do not stand a chance against local poultry," he said.

But local producers are not convinced that these measures will be enough. Voicing some of their complaints, Salem argued that some producers fear that importers will buy rejected goods unfit for human consumption. In cases such as these, even if importers pay the high duties, they will still be able to sell their goods at prices below those of domestic poultry.

"What we (local producers) are demanding is the strict application of the rules," he stressed. "No one should be exempted from duties and the concerned authorities should make sure that imported chickens meet the specific health and quality standards."

"If this is guaranteed, then we have nothing to fear," said El-Sharqiya Poultry's chairman.

Naguib El-Helali, head of the Union of Poultry Producers, took the argument a step further, stating that the government should postpone the implementation of the decision for at least one year to give local producers a chance to prepare themselves for the competition.

El-Helali also noted that although producers knew of the government's plans, the sudden decision to lift the ban took them by surprise.

"We were not forewarned," he said. "Producing chickens does not take place overnight."

A transitional period, he stated, is necessary to give the market time to stabilise in light of several new developments that are taking place at once.

First is the decision to sell United Poultry, a public sector company. The privatisation of the company is expected to halt its production for some time and, according to El-Helali, will create a temporary gap in the market for a few months because the company produces 40 to 50 per cent of the chicks needed by local chicken farms.

"Whoever buys the company will need time to settle down and reorganise it before resuming production," he explained. "This may create a shortfall in locally produced chicks which will cause prices to rise."

El-Helali also pointed out that the decision to lift the ban seems to have chased away potential buyers for United Poultry.

"When the government announced the sale of eight production units owned by the company last month, they were snapped up," he recalled. "But now that nine more production unites have been offered for sale, nobody has come forward."

The market also needs time to recover from a recession which hit producers last season, he continued.

"There was a surplus in production that was not matched by demand," noted El-Helali. "This naturally caused prices to drop."

Local producers also believe that postponing the decision would give the parliament time to pass a new law establishing a federation of poultry producers, which would unite producers and help protect their rights in case of dumping.

Under the ban, the poultry industry in Egypt developed quickly, he stated, with around 260 million chickens raised annually.

"This figure not only covers local demand, but also allowed us to prepare for export," said El-Helali. "Because of the ban, producers felt safe and began putting in long-term, costly investments, as well as developing support industries to replace production needs previously met through imports."

"But nothing will compensate the businessmen who have made these investments if imported chickens ruin the local market," he warned.

A super-highway for Arab industry

Arab information network experts met in Cairo this week to discuss ways of developing an Arab industrial information network. **Rania Khallaf** sat in on the meeting

In his inaugural address at the first Arab workshop on information systems and networks, Industry and Mineral Resources Minister Soliman Reda affirmed the importance of enhancing comprehensive industrial data-bases in developing countries.

"The aim of this workshop is to train workers in industrial information centres and to acquaint them with the latest technology in the field of information and networks," said Reda at the opening of the six-day workshop sponsored by the Arab Organisation for Industrial Development and Mineral Resources (AOIDMR).

Among the key points highlighted during the workshop was the fact that some Arab countries had realised substantial gains, while others could not keep pace with the rapid developments in the information technology field.

"The workshop seeks to help Arab countries connect their information networks... and to explore new opportunities of cooperation and investment between them," stated Mohamed Karbid, chairman of the AOIDMR.

The organisation, he said, has recently established the Arab network for industrial information, a grid which aims to coordinate between different Arab industrial organisations as a basic step towards forming an Arab common market. Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Syria all participate in this network.

"We managed to establish sectional industrial databases, in addition to specialised secondary ones to upgrade trade relations," he said. "We hope these efforts will be crowned with the establishment of a comprehensive Arab industrial network by the end of the year."

"Providing precise facts and figures about different Arab industries is the basic element in enhancing free trade relations among Arab countries," Karbid explained.

The workshop, which included participants from a number of Arab countries including Sudan and Palestine, also addressed the need to extend project services to the rest of the Arab countries in order to set up a comprehensive Arab industrial database.

Progress along this front has already been realised, with some Arab organisations working hand-in-hand with various regional and European information network centres for several years.

There are, however, some obstacles which stand in the way of establishing a comprehensive Arab industrial database.

"Arab telecommunication networks still need to be developed more," Karbid told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "And modern administrative techniques in the fields of data gathering and analysis must be adopted."

"We also have to develop information research centres, and staff them with well-trained personnel," said Karbeed, adding that once in place, this network will definitely lead to a boost in trade relations among Arab countries.

"I think that this step will help facilitate achieving the Arab free trade zone,"' he stressed.

Nasser El-Mahalawi, head of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference's (OIC) Islamic Bank, said that information networks are now viewed as a basic source of social and economic development by all countries.

The Islamic Bank has focused a great deal of attention on the establishment of an information network project dubbed as OICIS-Net. The project provides a number of services in the field of telecommunications and information, and aims to promote cooperation between Arab and regional organisations in the fields of trade, agriculture, science and technology.

The OICIS-Net, said El-Mahalawi, is an ideal example of an Arab information network which offers several value-added services, such as on-line access to databases which cover topics like agriculture, trade, industry and science and technology.

Investment decrees

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak issued this week a decree establishing the General Investment and Free Trade Authority, which is to be affiliated to the Ministry of Economy.

The authority is charged with studying and approving investment-related projects, proposing procedures facilitating guarantees and incentives for investments and preparing and announcing investment projects.

The decree was issued concurrently with the executive regulations of the new Investment Incentives Law, which regulate investment activities, new companies and individual enterprises, automatic tax privileges for companies and enterprises, and the operation of free zones. The regulations also define which authorities should allocate land for investment purposes.

Gas use rising

EGYPTIAN private sector companies will be able to secure licenses to finance and construct natural gas grids throughout Egypt, said Oil Minister Hamdi El-Banbi.

El-Banbi's decision, announced during the recent inauguration of a new natural gas fueling station and vehicle conversion centre in Giza, is part of the government's efforts to expand the use of natural gas as an alternative to oil in powering vehicles. Another 22 conversion and natural gas fueling stations will be established in the next few years, he added.

Several stations are already in operation around the Greater Cairo area and in other towns around the country, and are owned and operated by several multinational and Egyptian petroleum companies such as AMOCO, GUPCO and the Natural Gas Vehicles Company (NGVC).

The NGVC station in Heliopolis, said ministry officials, has already converted 800 vehicles since it began operations in January 1996.

Natural gas has been promoted as a cost effective alternative to oil, with one cubic metre of compressed natural gas (CNG) retailing for LE0.45 — nearly half the cost of a litre of gasoline (one cubic metre of CNG = one litre of gasoline).

Golden summer

A drop in world gold prices this year means that consumers no longer need to be born with a silver spoon in their mouths to make a purchase, reports **Abeer Anwar**

Egyptians and Arabs, whose demand for gold during the summer traditionally drives up the price of the metal, were in for a treat this season as gold prices dropped to their lowest levels in years.

Last year, the price of one gram of 18 carat gold stood at roughly LE34. But by the same time this year, the price had dropped to LE27 per gram.

Part of the reason behind the decline in prices is a 20 per cent tariff cut on gold bullion which came into effect earlier this year, explained Mohamed Moussa, a jeweller in Heliopolis.

But while locally-manufactured gold jewellery has dropped in price, the decline has not been matched by a similar reduction in the cost of imported gold jewellery.

Moussa says that this is "because customs on imported jewellery have reached 60 per cent."

The drop in prices in Egypt is also linked to the decrease in the price of gold on the international market. On world markets, the cost of gold has fallen to its lowest level in 12 years, reaching $315 per ounce on the London precious metals exchange.

Similar cuts in prices have also been registered on the Arab markets, with a kilo of 24 carat gold in Saudi Arabia, for example, now selling for 38.000 riyals compared to 48,000 riyals the same time last year (one riyal=LE0.90).

Further fueling this decline in international prices, explains Sultan Abu Ali, a former minister of economy, is the fact that businessmen and investors have turned to dollar deposits instead of gold.

Whenever the interest on dollar deposits increases, the price of gold decreases, he noted.

An increase in the supply of gold on the international market, with a number of countries such as Germany, Russia and Australia selling a sizable chunk of their gold stock for a variety of reasons, has also helped drive down prices.

Consumers, however, are not concerned with the macro-economics of the gold trade. Instead, as 22-year-old Gihan Hisham said, while completing a bargain purchase in a Cairo jewellery shop, "I had to take advantage of these tempting prices."

Egypt and Lebanon to boost ties

A joint Egyptian-Lebanese committee meeting could provide a much-needed boost in trade between the two countries, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**

The Egyptian delegation to the second meeting of the Joint Egyptian–Lebanese High Committee in Beirut last week culminated in the signing of 12 economic and cultural cooperation agreements.

The focus of the meeting, which was co-chaired by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and his Lebanese counterparts was promoting bilateral cooperation between both countries.

To that end, a memorandum of understanding dealing with Egyptians working illegally in Lebanon was signed by Ahmed El-Amawi, Egypt's minister of labour and immigration and his Lebanese counterpart.

According to the memorandum, Egyptian workers illegally working in Lebanon will be given a three-month grace period to secure the proper work permits from Lebanese authorities, or leave the country.

Youssef Sadakh, chargé d'affairs at the Lebanese Embassy in Cairo explained that this issue has long been a sore point between both countries.

"There are 10,000 Egyptians working without a permit in Lebanon,, aside from another 40.000 workers lawfully employed there," he said..

But less thorny issues were also addressed during the committee's meeting, including matters related to tourism, education, and social issues.

The two sides also signed an agreement on cooperation between the General Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce (GFECC) and the Federation of Trade, Industry and Agriculture in Lebanon.

"Under this agreement, both sides are to encourage joint investment projects and provide information on any economic and investment laws that may be of interest to businessmen," stated Khaled Abu Ismail, the GFECC's deputy chairman.

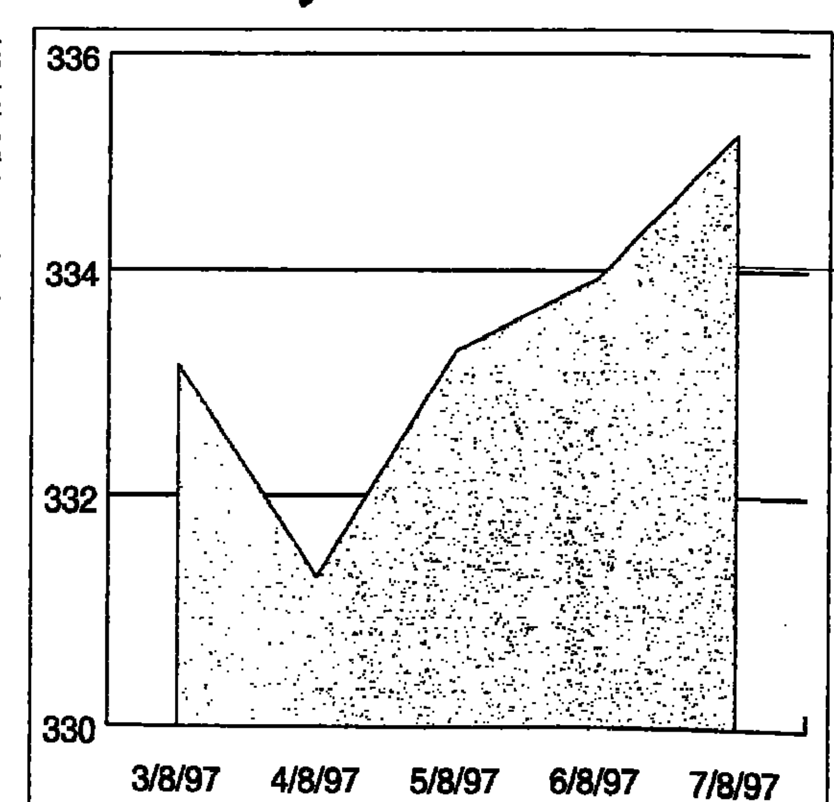
Each federation is responsible for boosting economic relations and facilitating contacts with officials of its country, he added.

Also discussed was the means of increasing the volume of trade between the two countries which, said Abu Ismail, "was a very modest $80 million in 1996."

Egypt's exports to Lebanon accounted for $60 million, while Lebanese exports to Egypt totalled $20 million. This figure, he said, "should increase to $300 million after the signing of the cooperation agreements during the committee meetings."

Market report

Ghali: trade, or else



THE GENERAL Market Index witnessed a marginal increase of 1.5 points during the week ending 7 August. But this increase was not matched by the value of trading, which declined to LE193.734 million compared to the pervious week's level of LE256 million.

The minimal increase in the GMI came as result of the end-of-week statements by Youssef Boutros Ghali, the minister of economy, who tackled the issue of organising the market's transactions. According to Boutros Ghali, shares of any listed company that are not traded for six consecutive months will be cancelled from the list of stocks on the exchange. This decision, he said, is expected to encourage trading.

Trading in the shares of Nasr Clothing and Textiles (KABO) accounted for 10.49 per cent of the total market turnover, with LE20.3 million in shares changing hands. Its stock gained LE5.12 to close at LE107.62. On the other hand, trading in the shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) cornered the lion's share of the market turnover in terms of the number of stocks traded. Trading 269,110 shares, CIB captured 9.8 per cent of the volume of dealings for the week, and gained LE1.45 per share to end at LE72.75.

Topping the list of companies registering gains in their share value was Canal Shipping Agencies, which registered a 26.91 per cent increase during the week to close at LE5.99.

Shares of the National Alexandria Iron and Steel Company suffered the highest loss, declining by 18.3 per cent to stabilise at LE162.45.

Out of the 133 companies traded through the week, 47 witnessed increases in share value, 52 decreased and the rest registered no change.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

India celebrates its 50th year of independence



A message from K R Narayanan, president of the Republic of India

FIFTY years is not long in the life of our ancient nation. But, the golden jubilee of our freedom is imbued with a profound significance. This anniversary marks a historic event when, as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, the soul of our nation, long suppressed, found utterance. It is a celebration of the victory of the principles of peace and non-violence against the might of what was once the biggest empire on earth.

On this momentous occasion, I recall the glorious sacrifices of the martyrs and heroes, the brave women and men who participated in our freedom struggle. The nation pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi for illuminating the righteous path of truth and duty and the precept that right means are necessary to achieve noble goals. We pay tribute to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and other founding fathers of our Constitution for giving us a dynamic and living Constitution which embodies the yearnings of our people for justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. We bow our heads in memory of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the maker of modern India, for laying the foundation for democratic economic and social development and for providing a vision for India, as an equal active participant in the community of nations.

As we stand today at the threshold of a new century, we can look back with a sense of satisfaction at the achievements of independent India. We have established vibrant democratic institutions and the rule of law. Food self-sufficiency, a diversified industrial base and a large pool of creative, talented and highly-qualified human resources provide us with a viable basis for rapid economic advancement.

The challenge before us, as we enter into a new millennium, is to achieve growth with social justice. The fruits of development must reach the under-privileged, the deprived and the downtrodden. As our economy liberalises and integrates with the global economy, we must ensure that the weaker sections of society are not marginalised in our economic processes. Indeed, as the private sector assumes greater importance in the economy, the state can and should play a more active role in meeting social and economic needs and concerns of the poorer sections. Only thus will we achieve the cherished goal of justice in all its dimensions — social, economic and political.

President K R Narayanan

On the auspicious occasion of the golden jubilee of our independence, I extend my warm greetings and felicitations to all Indians, including those who are spread out in many countries of the world. I wish them happiness and success in their endeavours in the service of society. I also extend fraternal greetings, on behalf of the people of India and on my own behalf, to the friendly people of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

From India: Mohamed Youssef Habib

Diversification is the keyword at Guardian Plasticote

Mr Ranjit Sen

WHEN the Gujarat Industrial Investment Corp (GIIC) was advertising nationwide, the conductive investment climate in Gujarat, one of the endorsees was Adi Godrej. Another was Ranjit Sen, executive director of Calcutta-headquartered Guardian Plasticote.

Plasticote what? This is precisely the sort of response that Sen wishes to evoke. "We have always believed in maintaining a very low profile," he says.

But this muted presence in the public mind hasn't prevented the company from emerging at the top of its chosen vocation — making plastic-coated paper used in a variety of articles from soaps and detergents to batteries and ice cream. Guardian Plasticote is the largest manufacturer of polyethylene-coated paper in India.

In a true entrepreneurial style, Sen is now on the threshold of diversifying into allied and not-so-allied fields. First, he wants to tone up the plastic-coated packaging scene and make it more relevant for India. Unfortunately, most people in India ape what is popular in the West and then try to apply the same in India; this results in an imbalance as input costs of raw materials are much higher in India and in many cases, for example, where high barrier films are used, the cost of the packaging is often higher than what is inside.

Sen claims that as of now, polyethylene-coated paper is most suited for local conditions but he plans to introduce packaging material of more appropriate specifications. Talks are on with existing foreign partner American National Can (a US giant in packaging material with a 1991 turnover of around $5 billion). The estimated cost of the project is Rs15 crore.

Power without the price through Ashida Electronics

Manohar Kulkarni

ASHIDA Electronics Pvt Ltd is an enterprise manned by technocrats for 27 years. They are among first generation technocrats, who have established the trade name of Ashida in the industrial electronics field in India. They specialise in non-destructive testing, innovative instrumentation and industrial automation instrumentation. Developing countries — where technical manpower for high-tech industries is not available, but they want all the advantages of modern technology-based instrumentation — require a special approach of appropriate technology-based instrumentation. A better low-cost benefit should result by using these instruments. Ashida specialises in designing and producing highly-reliable equipment suitable for working in tropical conditions. Ashida's protection relays for power systems useful for generation transmission and distribution are proven for reliability in the field of electrical utilities. They are micro-controller-based technology applications with serial output ports for supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) adaptability.

Renowned switchgear manufacturers such as GEC-Alsthom, BHEL-Bhopal, Crompton Greaves Ltd, Siemens Ltd, S & S Power Switchgear Ltd, Voltas Switchgear Ltd, etc, are already using Ashida relays and are regularly bidding in their various electricity boards and other government institutions as well as in the private sector.

Renowned consultants such as Tata Consulting Engineers, UDHE (India Ltd, Davy Power Gas Ltd, DCPL, LCB, MN Dastur, etc, are recommending Ashida relays in their various projects. The corporate companies like Herdillia Chemicals Ltd, Mukund Ltd, Jolly Boards, Reliance Industries Ltd (Patalganga), Raymond Calitri Ltd, Ambuja Cements, Torrent Pharmaceuticals, Garda Chemicals, etc, are using Ashida relays.

Ashida's managing director is Mr Manohar Kulkarni, who is first-class carrier technocrat since 1937. He is assisted by a team of dedicated engineers. The company has established its credentials as first-class original equipment manufacturer vendor ISO 9001 companies, manufacturing switch gear equipment and control panels. They are now emerging as a reliable protection relay company with an Indian brand name in the international arena.

Addya at a glance

S N Addya

S C ADDYA ZMG Co. (P) Ltd began its activities in 1983, earning great success in providing the best fish-hooks to its customers of the highest calibre and at a low cost.

The company is now able to compete with foreign companies — such as those from Norway, Japan and South Korea — in this industry which for 10 years was dominated by such companies.

As the company succeeded in the sale of fish-hooks and fishing equipment, demand for local imports gradually decreased. After this, the company expanded their interests and began exporting their products to countries like Oman and the United Arab Emirates shortly after the Indian government decided to open new horizons for its economy by encouraging exports through numerous incesives.

Today, Addya exports fish-hooks to the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan and Somalia.

Addya Co, owned by S N Addya, is constantly seeking new markets for its high quality products offered at competitive prices in all corners of the world.

NCBA serving the generations

SINCE its inception, the New Central Book Agency (NCBA) has served numerous generations with their valuable and outstanding publications in different branches of science, humanities, commerce, law, engineering and medicine. It originally started as a partnership firm way back in 1921, importing in bulk publications of eminent British and American publishers. Gradually, the firm started to venture into its own publications, starting with school books. Within 20 years, i.e. during the thirties and forties, the firm established itself as a leading publisher of school books in undivided Bengal, operating from Calcutta and Dhaka simultaneously.

During the early forties, when the Indian publishing industry was at its infancy and when the Indian book market, specifically the medical book market, depended solely on imported books, NCBA ventured and initiated the publishing of advanced textbooks in anatomy, physiology, surgery and medicine.

This dedicated and ambitious organisation has today established itself as a leading publishing house in India and the largest vertically integrated college-level textbook publisher of Eastern India, having its own computerised typesetting, printing and binding units coupled with a marketing network throughout the country and even abroad. The company is now exporting in bulk (mostly medical, engineering and scientific titles) to about sixteen countries either directly or through exporters. Diversification, modernisation and international collaborations have been recieiving top priorities in recent years.

In the coming years, NCBA is determined to fulfil the academic requirements of the student community and book lovers alike with quality, dedication and innovation.

SMT at your service

SMT Machines (India) Ltd, promoted by Mr Surinder Mittal, who has over 25 years experience in manufacturing and marketing of rolling mill plants and accessories including turnkey projects, is actively engaged to design and develop plants that have flex product mix convertibility with exceptionally low capital and maintenance cost and are best suited to requirements of developing countries.

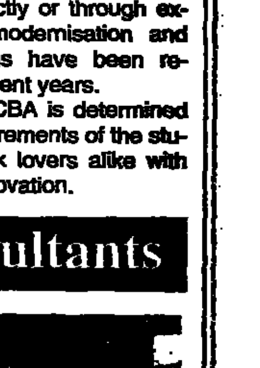
Continuous adoption of new concepts and technologies has become all the more relevant in the competitive market, wherein, the survival of the re-rolling industry will depend upon continuous improvement in operating efficiency, better yields and low-specific energy consumption. To achieve this, SMT is always at your service with a team of qualified and experienced professionals.

SMT is making sincere effort to synthesise drawing board expertise with the contributions of skilled technicians to build a cost-effective technology that meets the requirements of developing countries.

Apart from establishing a client base across the nation, SMT has also succeeded in taping export markets of SARRC nations, South-East Asia and the Middle East. But this is not all: SMT is striving hard to reach the status of leader in small- and medium-sized industries.

On the eve of the Golden Jubilee of the Independence of India, we extend you a warm welcome and commit ourselves to achieve new heights in technological growth for developing nations.

Shukriya: the professional manpower consultants



SHUKRIYA is one of India's leading professional manpower consultants. In the fast changing corporate world where customisation is the key word, Shukriya comes out in flying colours.

A multi-disciplinary organisation, it offers integrated and result-oriented consultancy packages to its clients. They have carved a niche for themselves by specialising in precise and specific recruitment packages from a cross-section of India's traditional manpower resources. It has the expertise and intrastructure to handle complete assignment, i.e. from short-listing potential candidates to the final deployment.

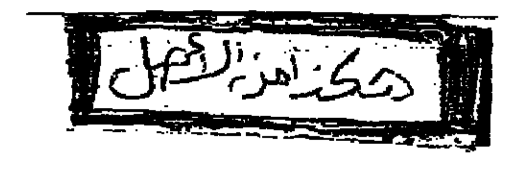
In the last two decades the company has moved from strength to strength and is today one of the most professional overseas recruitment agents, falling in top category as determined by the Indian Ministry of Labour.

A vast and exhaustive computerised data bank is regularly updated and contains applications of some of the best talents available in the country. They have a long list of satisfied clientele whom they regularly service for their requirements both onshore and offshore.

According to Mr Kamilu, the force behind Shukriya, their main points for success are hard work and honesty both towards their clients and prospective candidates. As agents for their overseas clients they adhere strictly to the parametres set by their principals.

The result has been that all the clients associated with them from the beginning do not have a single complaint against them either from the Protector of Emigrants, India, or from any of the Indian embassies. This has built up a good will which Mr Kamilu believes is their biggest asset.

Due to what Shukriya is today, it is no wonder that they have an impressive list of clientele which includes multinationals, industries, petro-chemical companies and various government agencies.



Closure: theory and practice

A new strategy must be found to combat Israeli terrorism, writes **Azmi Bishara**. Numbed to the suffering of the Palestinians, the world must be reminded of the daily torture of closure



"Closure" in the Israeli political dictionary has become an abstraction that conveys to the Israeli people, whether they belong to Labour or Likud, that they will not run the risk of bumping into a Palestinian worker near their homes. Closure as it is experienced by Palestinian citizens, on the other hand, radically differs from the abstraction. To the Palestinians, closure is very concrete and penetrates the entire fabric of Palestinian society.

The areas that have been occupied since 1967 are isolated from Israel. Closing off these areas in effect implements a process of wide-scale deliberate impoverishment, an economic blockade that affects virtually all areas of work and commerce. In addition, the West Bank is cut off from Gaza, which itself resembles a concentration camp. Palestinian villages are cut off from the cities, cities are isolated from one other, and some areas of the city are severed from the others, sequestered behind piles of rubble, cement blocks and other unsightly obstacles conjured up by the imagination of the occupation authorities. Not a single Palestinian family, in fact not a single Palestinian individual, has been left unaffected by this curious "closure" which hampers every aspect of their daily routine, social relations and life in general. This is more than a blockade of patches of land. It is a deliberate attempt to dismember Palestinian society — one might say a process of "sociocide".

Closure is not a way to pressure the PA into taking "the fight against terrorism" seriously. It is a process of tightening the screw on Palestinian society in order to force Palestinian leaders into making political concessions on the issues that led to the five-month deadlock in negotiations. In particular, Palestinian leaders are being coerced into making concessions on the issue of Israeli settlements now that the recent Jerusalem bombings have caused the issue of Israeli security to supplant the settlement question as the primary obstacle to negotiations. Closure is also a strategy to pressure the Palestinian leadership into backing down on its insistence that Israel abide by its Oslo commitments and entering the final status negotiations before Israel fulfills these commitments.

The intent, of course, is to transform the amended transitional phase into the permanent status. By amended transitional phase I am referring to the current Israeli government's attempt to renege on the Oslo agreements and to return to the Likud concept of "self rule". This scheme revolves around those areas designated by the Alon plan at the time of the Camp David accords for return to Jordan. This time, however, the Gaza Strip would also be included, and the recipient would be the PA, not Jordan. At the same time, the scheme would be founded upon the Oslo infrastructure as it has been applied up to now, dividing the areas occupied since 1967 into areas "A", "B" and "C". It would also comprise those parts of Jerusalem which are not subject to the post-1967 division. The amended transitional phase as a permanent solution would bring areas "A" and "B" under the control of the PA while the settlements in area "C" would remain under Israeli control. Everything outside this scope would be subject to negotiation, or, rather, subject to Israel's ability to impose its will. These are the broad outlines of the Likud scheme, without going into the details of other issues such as the port, the airport and the safe passage cordon in which Israel may be prepared to make concessions in exchange for a modification of the Palestinian position.

Israel is using collective punishment against innocent civilians in order to achieve security objectives (pressing the PA into the service of preserving Israeli security) and strategic objectives (imposing conditions pertaining to the permanent solution and the implementation of its transitional phase obligations).

What is the term for imposing punitive measures against civilians in order to achieve political objectives? According to the American political science lexicon that has spread with the globalisation of the media, it is terrorism. While the Israeli government claims to be combating terrorism, it is in fact practicing terrorism.

More ominous yet is the fact that Israel is engaging in this organised terrorism by taking advantage of the conditions the Oslo agreements have offered up till now. It is true that Israel has violated these agreements in many of the sanctions it has imposed on the PA. It has halted the transfer to the PA of taxes levied from Palestinian workers. Israeli security forces have been given the go-ahead to mount security operations within the areas subject to PA control. The punitive measures taken against the Palestinian society as a whole are employing the very instruments furnished by Oslo.

According to Oslo, the Israeli army enjoys absolute freedom to operate inside areas "B" and "C", a freedom which includes the right to control primary junctures and accesses. This provision has been interpreted to give the army the right to constrain the freedom of movement of any citizen, to set up road blocks and pile up rubble at any access point to any neighbourhood it chooses without this constituting a blatant infringement of the agreements that have been ratified up to the present. The same applies to the expansion of settlements and the confiscation of Palestinian-owned land in area "C". This means, in effect, that the Israeli army can also blockade the isolated pockets of land that constitute area "A".

It is not our intent to castigate those who supported the Oslo agreements. By Oslo we are not referring to the Declaration of Principles (DoP), but rather to the subsequent details that aimed at transforming Oslo into a practicable document and to the actual application of these agreements on the ground. The situation grows increasingly pernicious whenever we move from the abstract to the concrete, from theory (the DoP) to reality.

A simple principle is in operation that runs counter to all the conceptualisations of the relationship between the Palestinians and Israel as posited by the agreements that have been signed to date. This principle is that the balance of power between the two sides is to be the first and final arbiter, not only in the textual context of the agreements alone, but as they are translated into practice according to the dictates of Israeli violence and brutality.

It is essential to fully comprehend the dynamics of this principle in order to form at least a basic notion of how to combat the current situation, not only in terms of Israel's deliberate and premeditated violation of Oslo, but in terms of the struggle to curtail Israel's capacity to resort to its superior force. Since, for the present, we will not be able to curb this force itself, we must seek the means to limit Israel's capacity to blatantly exploit it in the political battle that erupted after the signing of unjust agreements. The political battle intensified after the Likud's accession to power which furnished the supporters of these agreements with a new reading that probably had not occurred to them at the time of Oslo, although others had warned them of this possibility. Bickering over the past, however, is futile. What is important at this stage is not to counter the agreements themselves but to confront the realities they have produced.

If we are to counter Israel's ability to impose its reading of the agreements by force, we have to bring into play some principles of political action that have never been fully mastered by the Palestinian national liberation movement. These are the principles of political action as they are practiced in the West.

These principles can be particularly effective now that the Arab world has demonstrated its capacity to exert pressure on Israel on behalf of the Palestinians. For the first time since the signing of the DoP, the Arab regimes have showed solidarity with the Palestinian position, a stance which is backed by the other nations of the Islamic world.

At the same time, the PA leadership can hold off against the current Israeli pressures. But it cannot break the current balance of power unless it carries out a comprehensive suicide operation by precipitating a full-scale military confrontation with Israel along contiguous boundaries. Since the PA leadership is clearly not prepared to do this, the alternative is to seek to limit Israel's capacity to use the instruments of state terrorism.

This is where these principles of political action come into play. They involve rallying the support of public opinion in the West, in the US specifically, and even inside Israel. The battle for public opinion is crucial as the US progressively falls into line with the dictates of Israeli policy. Even as it whispers some criticism of Israeli practices such as withholding the transfer of money to the PA, the US will send its delegates to help Israel reap the benefits of the blockade. Thus, Israel will lift the closure in exchange for Palestinian measures guaranteeing Israeli security and the final phase of negotiations can begin with a suspension of settlement activity for a token period of time (a month, for example). The battle is all the more crucial when one realises how easily the Israeli Labour Party will fall in line with this scenario.

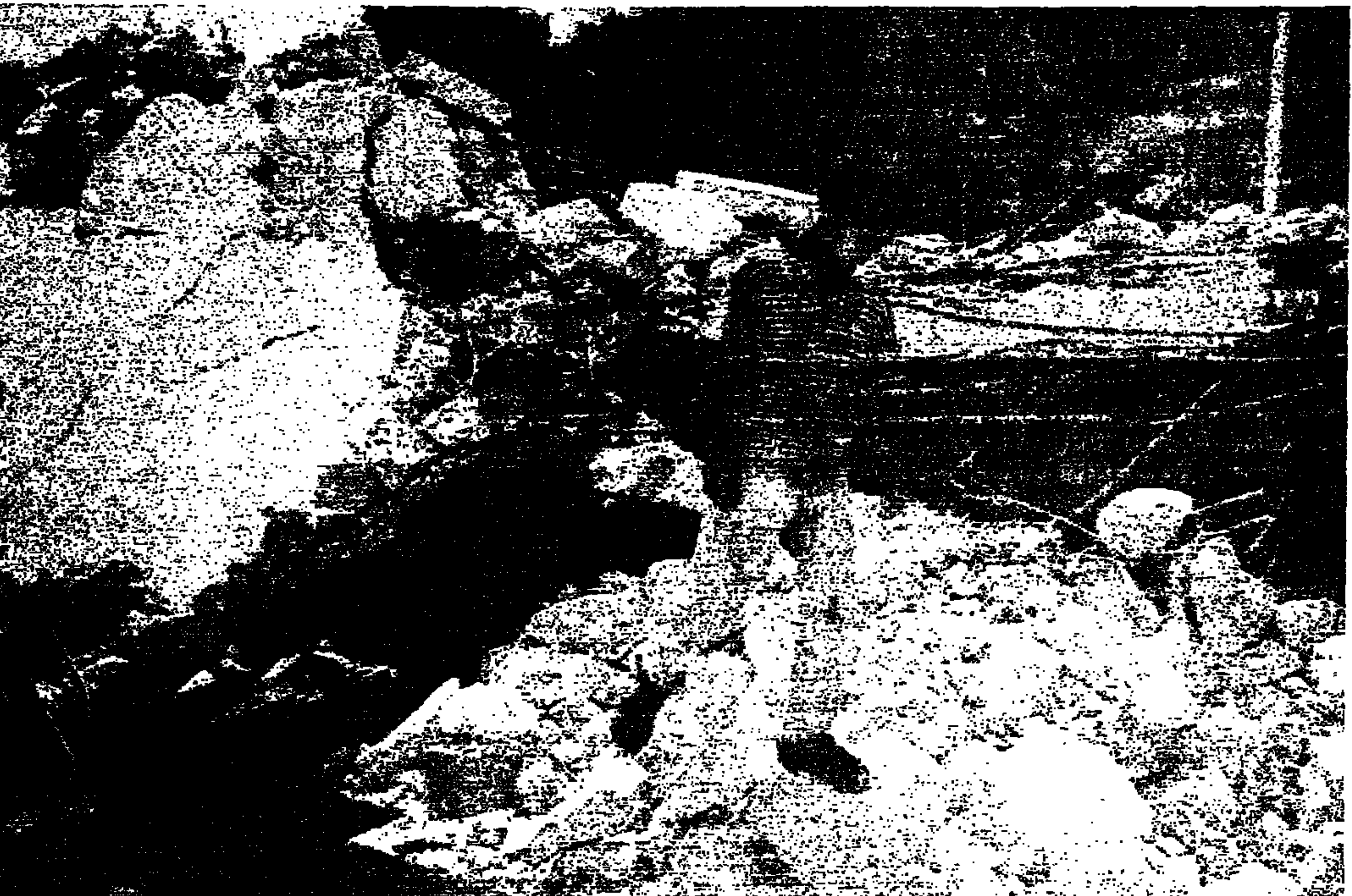


photo: Khaled Zighari

As long as the Arab world is unable to pressure the US and Israel, it must mount a campaign to directly influence public opinion in these countries. In order for it to do so, however, it is essential that the PA understand the principles of political action in these countries, for they differ radically from the principles applied to influence the Arab world and most other Third World countries.

As a first step, we must address rationally the various lobbies and pressure groups in the West. We should target in particular the minorities and those groups that are most able to understand the suffering of the Palestinian people. This involves mounting a large-scale support campaign for the Palestinians as an oppressed people subjected to circumstances very similar to those of South Africa under apartheid. The campaign should focus on two levels: the human, ethical level that conveys, without sensationalism, the injustices to which the Palestinian people are subjected; and the political level that communicates the threat which Israeli practices pose to "peace and stability". In this latter focus, it should be emphasised that these practices do not contribute to "the fight against terrorism" but, on the contrary, contribute to fostering terrorism, not just inside Palestine but in the Middle East as a whole and internationally.

In spite of the state of apartheid imposed on the Palestinian people, there is no international campaign to rally support for this people at the level of political parties, NGOs, parliamentary and non-parliamentary pressure groups and the media. Since Oslo, international opinion has adopted "progress and regression in the peace process" as the standard by which to measure the political situation in the region. That the Palestinian leadership also applies these standards has reduced the entire issue of Palestine to a question of inter-governmental contacts: US, Egyptian, and Jordanian delegations, "opening new channels for Israeli-Palestinian communications", "exerting pressure on both sides" and other such concepts are used to blunt and defuse public opinion in the West. These are the terms that bring Western public opinion under the influence of Zionist propaganda alone and enable it to capitalise on the disastrous effects of such actions as the recent suicide bombings in West Jerusalem. Such operations do not serve to pressure the Israeli government. Rather, they only serve to inflict suffering on the Israeli poor who do their shopping in the public markets where the bombings took place, and to drive Western and Israeli public opinion to support the official Israeli and US positions.

I not only find such operations morally abhorrent, I find them strategically futile. They are counterproductive in the fight to influence Israeli and Western opinion. Moreover, not only do they fail to diminish the superiority of Israel's force, they enhance Israel's capacity for resorting to force. Evidently, there must be another strategy that governs such operations, a mysterious strategy that no one has bothered to explain to us.

The writer is an Arab member of the Knesset.

India celebrates its 50th year of independence



A special message from the Indian ambassador to Egypt



Kanwal Sibal
Indian ambassador to Egypt

ON 15 August we celebrate 50 years of India's independence. Our minds go back to the great sacrifices made by the leaders of India's freedom struggle against colonial rule. Mahatma Gandhi, inspired by the principles of non-violence and truth, gave a unique moral content to India's freedom. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, added political and economic content by consolidating India's democratic institutions and laying the foundation for India's industrialisation.

Fifty years of India's independence also mark fifty years of Indo-Egyptian friendship. The highlights of this friendship were the Nehru-Nasser years when India gave unstinted support to Egypt facing external aggression, the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, the advancement of the agenda for de-colonisation, development and disarmament and against apartheid, and the continuing close cooperation in all international forums to preserve the legitimate rights and interests of the developing countries as the structures of the new world order took shape. The grant of the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding to President Mubarak marks a recognition of President Mubarak's outstanding role in promoting peace, friendship and goodwill amongst peoples and signifies a step towards restoring previous levels of warmth and ties and mutual esteem between the leaders of the two countries.

The Golden Jubilee Celebrations will last one year, starting 15 August. In Egypt we propose to have a series of cultural and economic events aimed at increasing mutual awareness and reinforcing understanding at the people to people level. Economic reforms and trade liberalisation measures in both countries have opened up new opportunities for increasing bilateral trade and investment, especially for the private sector. Significantly, Indian firms have started investing in Egypt and 11 of the 31 approved projects have already been implemented. The Indo-Egyptian Joint Commission meeting in April this year, led by the foreign ministers of the two countries, has established a forward-looking framework for deepening our commercial and economic ties.

Al-Ahram has always positively contributed to better understanding between Egypt and India. I express my sincere appreciation to the paper for publishing this excellent supplement to mark the 50th anniversary of India's independence.

Mubarak invited to India to receive the Nehru Award



Jaylan Allam
Egyptian ambassador to India

THE PRESIDENT of India has extended an invitation to President Mubarak to visit India to undertake discussions on issues of mutual interest to both countries, as well as to receive the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding, said Jaylan Allam, Egyptian ambassador to India.

Allam said that the annual award is traditionally presented to the winner on 14 November, at a lavish ceremony attended by a number of former Indian prime ministers, party officials, ministers, diplomats and public figures. The government of India, however, has extended an inivitation for President Mubarak to visit at any suitable time, especially since Mubarak's last visit to India took place in 1983.

President Mubarak is the first Egyptian to receive this award, which was introduced 30 years ago, Allam said. The award shows India's high estimation of President Mubarak and the people of Egypt, and reflects the great strides which Egyptian-Indian relations have made.

President Mubarak's receiving of this award, the highest Indian decoration given to international figures, comes at a time when India is celebrating its 50th year of independence. This celebration will be most significant, as India will be visited by many presidents and leaders from different countries. The occasion will also mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between Egypt and India.

The Egyptian ambassador to India added that the selection committee for the Nehru Award was comprised of 7 persons headed by K R Narayanan, former vice-president and current president of India.

In a statement released by the selection committee confirming the awarding of the prize to President Mubarak, it was mentioned that President Mubarak is distinguished by his patience, caution, and determination, along with his deep insight, which has allowed Egypt to march forward towards progress and stability. Mubarak also had the courage to face the dangers of terrorism, while economic reform has yielded positive results, achieving progress, developing infrastructure and preparing Egypt to face the obstacles of the 21st century. This will be further realised through the New Valley Project, which is evidence of Mubarak's deep vision. Egypt, in light of President Mubarak's leadership, has played a major role in the peace process.

The statement also stated that the choice of President Mubarak to receive the Jawaharlal Nehru Award was due to his important role in providing stability and security to his country, embracing Arab issues and supporting peace and understanding throughout the region and participating in the efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement to achieve peace, justice and equality in the world.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Peace with Netanyahu?

About the only thing that those involved in the peace process can agree on is that there is no evidence of progress. From here on, interpretations and demands differ tremendously.

Netanyahu still harps on about security considerations as a prerequisite to peace. And the Arabs still *maintain that security* will only emerge once peace is realised. These arguments have been thrown back and forth for over a year — still no progress.

Ross's visit to the region is not likely to change this standoff unless Netanyahu begins to come to terms with the reality of the situation — repression, intimidation and coercion are not a formula for anything but more bloodshed and instability.

Ross, however, has commented that the security component of peace is not the only basis to the continuation of the final status negotiations. This message, hopefully, will be made clear to Madeleine Albright. But more important, this message must be drilled into the Israeli premier's head before another suicide bomber, bent on revenge, blows all hope of peace to oblivion.

Given the current state of the process, it is likely that some measure of reconciliation and compromise will emerge from Israel. An Israeli Arab delegation visited Syria, carrying messages from Israeli officials, including Labour's Ehud Barak.

Barak, whom *Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad* praised as offering a touch of sense and sensibility to a situation exacerbated by political naiveté and ludicrousness, admits that the process must go on, both with the Palestinians and the Syrians.

The basis of these negotiations, naturally, should be the land-for-peace deal and a respect for each party's right to self-determination. If Netanyahu's stunted political vision is unable to fathom these terms, there are other Israelis more than willing to pick up where Rabin was forced to leave off.

It will be through the efforts of those who eschew narcissistic political aspirations and intimidation, in favour of cooperation, that a lasting agreement providing for security will be concluded.

Vicissitudes of faith

In the first part of his discussion of the new Islamic discourse, Abdelwahab Elmissiri *reviews the* various ways in which Muslims have attempted to understand and change the world, and suggests that Islamic and secular frameworks first met on common ground

Some people tend to view Islam as if it were a *monolithic or one-dimensional* entity. *Islam is* undoubtedly the faith of transcendental monotheism, the belief in the one and only God, who transcends both man and nature. But monotheism does not lead to monism; on the contrary, it leads to plurality and diversity. For from a strictly Islamic point of view, except for God, everything else exists in variety. Therefore, there is not one single Islamic discourse, but rather a variety of discourses that manifest the various endeavours (*ijtihad*) of the Muslims, within a specific time and place, to understand the world around them and to interpret the Qur'an.

One may divide the Islamic discourse prevalent at the present time into the following categories:

A populist-salvationist "messianic" discourse: This is the discourse of the overwhelming majority of the Muslim masses, who have instinctively realised that the processes of modernisation, secularisation and globalisation do the *umma* (Muslim community) no good and *bring no real reform. The masses have observed* that these processes are in essence nothing but processes of Westernisation, that rob the *umma* of its religious and cultural heritage, giving it nothing in return, and that have only led to more colonial hegemony and to more class polarisation within society.

Adhering to Islam, which they know well, the masses encapsulate themselves within their Islamic heritage, cry for help, and hope for salvation from God. But they are incapable of contributing any new ideas or organising any political movements. Their discourse frequently expresses *itself through spontaneous* and, at times, violent acts of protest against all forms of radical Westernisation *and colonial invasion. But more* usually it expresses itself in the form of philanthropy, either at the individual level (giving money to the poor), or at the community level (building mosques, hospitals and schools or distributing food to the public, especially in Ramadan, etc.).

The populist discourse is mainly the discourse of the poor and the marginal, but it is also the discourse of those wealthy members of society who *appreciate their religious* and cultural heritage, and who recognise that its loss would mean the loss of everything.

The political discourse: This is the discourse *of some middle-class* professionals, academicians, students and merchants, who perceive the need for Islamic action that can protect the *umma*. These people, having realised that political action *is the means for* achieving their objective, have initiated or participated in political organisations that do not resort to violence, and from which youth and educational organisations may branch out.

Some of the bearers of this political discourse harboured, at one time, the illusion that taking over the central state would be the long-sought-for panacea; some of them actually developed para-military organisations and tried to infiltrate the armed forces and seize power by force.

As of 1965, however, there has been a general inclination toward working through existing, legitimate political channels. *Most of the bearers of* this political discourse, at the present time, tend to restrict their activity to the political and/or the educational sphere.

The intellectual discourse: This discourse deals primarily with more theoretical and intellectual issues.

This classification does not mean the discourses exist in isolation from each other. In fact, the populist and political discourses more often than not merge; the same can be said of the political and intellectual discourses. Notwithstanding this common ground, from the analytical point of view we may assume their independence.

A chronological system of classification is also useful in understanding the various types of Islamic discourse. Taking time as our basic criterion, we reach the following categories:

The old Islamic discourse: which emerged as a direct and immediate reaction to the colonial invasion of the Muslim world, and prevailed till the mid-'60s.

The new Islamic discourse: After an initial period of uncertainty and marginalisation, this discourse began to assume a more definite form in the mid-'60s, and shifted gradually toward the centre.

Both *discourses* endeavoured to provide an Islamic answer to the questions raised by modernisation and colonisation. Nevertheless, there are radical points of divergence between them, stemming from two *interrelated points*: their respective attitudes towards Western modernity; the extent to which each discourse has developed a comprehensive outlook.

The first generation of *Muslim* reformists came *in contact* with the modern Western cultural formation in an historical era that is considerably different, in many aspects, from the present. It could be argued that the comprehensive secular paradigm, *the fundamental paradigm underlying the* modern Western cultural formation, has always occupied a central position in the conscience of modern Western man, and has always moulded his view of the universe.

The imperialist aspects of Western modernity also manifested themselves with extreme clarity from the outset. These facts notwithstanding, modern Western civilisation viewed itself as a humanistic, man-centred civilisation, and maintained, for some time, at the level of vision if not also at the level of practice, a sense of balance and faith in absolute moral and human values. At the structural level, Western *societies maintained*, for a long period of time, a high level of social coherence and solidarity. Family values, far from being an empty social slogan remembered during election days, were a concrete social *reality*.

But things changed. Secularism is not a fixed paradigm, but a dynamic paradigmatic sequence. By the end of the nineteenth century, many of the links that make up this sequence had not yet materialised. *Man's* private life and many aspects of his public life were still beyond the reach of the processes of secularisation. In other words, Western man was a secularist only in some aspects of his public life, *but remained committed* to moral and human values and, more often than not, to Christian religious values and codes of ethics. When the first generation of Islamic reformists, the bearers of the old Islamic discourse, encountered this modern cultural formation, they did not interact with a comprehensive secular civilisation but, rather, with a partially secular one.

The writer is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University.

Breaking the vicious circle

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that building a front which would include all parties advocating the establishment of a Palestinian state, regardless of their differences over what statehood should entail, could be a useful contribution to any common effort aimed at salvaging the peace process

Contrary to Shimon Peres, who repeatedly stated that he was ready to take calculated security risks for the sake of peace, current Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu has been alleging that, thanks to his motto, 'security before peace', Israel *has not been exposed to terrorist raids since* he assumed power. This assertion was refuted by the two suicide bomb attacks that rocked Jerusalem on July 30, killing 15 and injuring over 100. The attacks demonstrated that one side cannot unilaterally violate former peace engagements, as Netanyahu did by building settlements all over the occupied territories, including Arab East Jerusalem, without provoking a similar reaction from the other side. Now that both sides are resorting to violence and counter-violence, the question is whether there is a way of breaking the vicious circle.

The answer certainly does not lie in castigating *Arafat publicly for not honouring his commit*ment to ensure Israel's security, thereby depicting him to his Palestinian constituencies as a leader who can only remain in power by proving to the Israeli authorities that he is better able to guarantee their security than they themselves can. The real question is whether requiring Arafat to become a present-day quisling is the best way to prevent kamikaze operations and uphold peace, or whether the entire process is in need of an overhaul, particularly the role the American side is required to play.

Many prominent American politicians, including some close to the Jewish lobby, privately admit that the peace process is unlikely to be sustained as long as Netanyahu is in power, and that all that can be done at this stage is to lay the groundwork for the post-Netanyahu era, which necessarily *entails working to prevent his re*election for a second term extending into the next century. But what to do until the year 2000 which, though an arbitrary date, marks a historical *turning point which is always an* opportunity for the critical reassessment of basic political realities.

Can violence and counter-violence in the Middle East be contained while the peace process not only remains frozen but is actually degenerating into its opposite, as Netanyahu replaces the land-for-peace tradeoff by a systematic policy of building new Jewish settlements in the occupied Arab territories? As long as the Israeli government resorts to state violence to implement a policy that *runs counter to the very notion of peace in the re*gion, it is hard to see how the vicious circle of Palestinian counter-violence can be broken.

Both Cairo and Amman are striving to overcome the present impasse, but pinning hopes on the resumption of the talks at a time, Netanyahu is using them as a cover to push forward with his settlement policy can only be counterproductive. All the more so now that the peace process is being undermined not only by Netanyahu's violations, but also by violent Palestinian reactions that are more likely to escalate than the opposite. That is why the time has come to initiate some innovative pre-emptive diplomacy before it is too late, and *to adopt emergency measures to prevent* any further deterioration of the situation. A useful step in this direction might be to hold brainstorming sessions at the level of think-tanks, particularly between Arab and American experts in the field.

In less than ten days, I had the opportunity to meet twice with Henry Siegman, the coordinator of a report by an independent task force on US *Middle East policy and the peace process*, sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, a New York-based think tank close to the State Department. The first time I met Mr Siegman was at my home. During a short visit to Cairo, he asked to see me to discuss what he called my 'misrepresentation' of the report in previous articles of mine in *Al-Ahram Weekly*. By sheer coincidence, I met him a second time at the seminar *on Arab-American relations held last week in the* Moroccan resort of Assilah on the occasion of its 19th Cultural Festival hosted by its mayor, Mohamed Ben-Issa, who is also the Moroccan ambassador in Washington.

One of my main points of contention with Henry Siegman was over how the task force report contemplates the Palestinian state. As I read it, the report advocated the replacement of the land-for-peace tradeoff by another tradeoff: statehood for the Palestinians *in exchange for security for* Israel, that security for Israel entails the demilitarisation of the Palestinian state, the subordination of its right to sign agreements with external powers to Israel's security concerns, the *stationing of a contingent of Israeli forces in parts* of the Jordan Valley, the annexation of at least 10 per cent of the West Bank to Israel where most of the settlements are now concentrated. But a *state that is stripped of the most basic pre*rogatives of sovereignty will be a state in nothing but name.

However, given how critical the situation has become, and bearing in mind the need to avert a *complete breakdown of the peace process, it is* worth considering the possibility of developing a dialogue between all the parties which accept the principle of Palestinian statehood, irrespective of their differences over the prerogatives of that *state*, or over *other issues raised in the report*, such as abandoning the incremental approach or calling for a new Declaration of Principles.

In a way, the report reflects an inter-American dialogue between political figures who uphold the interests of the American establishment with all its component elements, and others, close to the American Jewish lobby, with particular concern for the interests of Israel. I propose that the *dialogue be extended to include Arab*, particularly Palestinian, intellectuals from different political schools. A dialogue with American intellectuals, including those belonging to the Jewish lobby, is not rejected out of *hand* by Arab intellectuals who have serious reservations about any kind of dealing with Israel. Thus the dialogue would stand a much better chance of success than the Copenhagen experiment.

I had hoped the Assilah seminar could be a forum for just such a meaningful dialogue, but my hopes were not realised because a discussion sponsored by a senior Moroccan diplomat cannot, and indeed should not, touch on critical issues of substance. On the other hand, these *constraints* would not apply if a think-tank like the Council on Foreign Relations took it on itself to organise such a dialogue, either in New York or in an Arab capital.

Axe men

By Naguib Mahfouz

As I have often written about thugs, I have been frequently asked *of late* what makes a thug.

The thug's life is directed by his strength. He can only be *stopped* by *force* more powerful than himself. The word thug or hooligan (*baltagi*) comes from the Turkish. Apparently, the Turkish army, before entering an area, would send out men carrying axes (*balta*) to cut down trees as a guide to the troops.

I would like to make an important point: the raison d'etre of government is to secure stability and security above all. If we look back at our history, we *find that the Nile sometimes* overflowed its banks, resulting in disputes between the peasants. The government then had to step in to keep the peace. *Ancient Egyptians sacrificed* time and freedom to achieve that security, so they could receive their fair share of irrigation water, ensure the growth of their crops, and *protect the har*vest from the other peasants. Security is of paramount importance to the state — without it there can be no state. Thuggery is not only terrorism which threatens the security of the community, but hooliganism as well. If somebody is attacked and shot at *night*, he does not much care whether the perpetrator was wearing a *galabiyya* or a pair of jeans. We must ensure security throughout Egypt.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Selective conscience

Al-Akhbar: "The US partner has turned into a partner to Israel alone. It sees the region through Netanyahu's eyes. It is even pressuring the Palestinians to a far greater extent than the Israelis want. I consider it unwise to put our confidence in Netanyahu or the White House. Our best bet is to try to isolate Israel on the international scene, politically and economically. We should begin by enforcing the decisions of the last Arab summit, including the boycott of Israel, our last weapon. Oddly enough, Qatar is still determined to host the Doha summit, just because the White House has announced that Madeleine Albright will attend."
(Ahmed Taha El-Naqr, 7 August)

Sabah El-Kheir: "Over the past 50 years, the situation has steadily worsened and Israel has grown more *intransigent. When the doors to peace finally* opened, the Israelis were quick to close them, abandoning all previous commitments. Netanyahu, having fanned the flames of hate and violence, is still building more settlements. Where *is human conscience?* The truth is that human conscience is still there, but it has a selective presence and it can be manipulated as if by remote control according to the whims of the Jewish lobby and its pro-Israeli friends, official and non-official."
(Raouf Tewfiq, 7 August)

Al-Wafd: "Recent US stances undermine the peace process and push the region to the brink of war and to times of enmity and hate. There is still an opportunity for peace if the US, *as the* peace broker, forces Israel to honour its commitments and accept the principle of land for peace. The US should realise that peace based on a fait accompli is an illusion and will not bring about security to the region."
(Editorial, 9 August)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The question is not one of Israeli bulldozers versus Palestinian bombs, but of an occupation power which uses aircraft, US-made guns *and napalm against a people who want* to liberate their land and have every right to resist occupation. In Madrid, the Arabs accepted the formula of "land for peace." Then Netanyahu came along and demanded *land*, peace, *water, oil* and security for Israel. The Arabs were given the choice between accepting this or being accused of terrorism. The Palestinian National Authority is expected to keep the Palestinians at heel *until Jerusalem*, the West Bank and the Golan are Judaised. The Oslo chapter is drawing to an end and the US is even more responsible than Israel for the demise of peace."
(Galal Aref, 9 August)

Al-Gomhuria: "Theoretically, the latest US proposals seem sound and acceptable to all sides. But it is important that Israel should stop trying to weaken or strangle the Palestinian National Authority and refrain from attacking South Lebanon. Ross should know that real security can only come about through peace and this is why negotiations should be encouraged on the *principle of land for peace* which has been endorsed by the US administration recently. The next step would be to remove the threat of war and begin restoring confidence between the relevant sides."
(Editorial, 10 August)

Rose El-Youssef: "Confidence-building measures in the Middle East could get under way if the US Administration were to end its passive attitude toward the region and discourage the Congress from meddling into its affairs. The relevant *sides* should be able to hold negotiations without being distracted by Netanyahu's measures or Congressional pro-Israeli decisions. Confidence-building measures are essential. The Palestinian National Authority and Israel should cooperate to achieve *security for* both sides. Also, Israel should stop its provocative acts."
(Mahmoud El-Tohamy, 11 August)

Compiled by **Hala Sagr**



Dennis Ross' nose is his most expressive trait, trembling slightly as if on the alert for odours of danger in the region. This organ is perhaps the true mediator, seeming to speak on its owner's behalf. His eyes are slightly out of focus, struggling to encompass both Arafat and Netanyahu. The points at which his jaw intersects with his chin, and the lock of silver hair on his forehead, are reminiscent of President Clinton, as befits the bearer of standard US policy messages.

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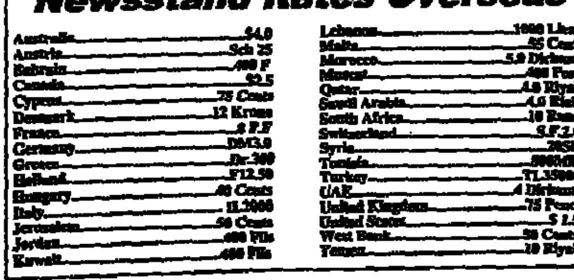
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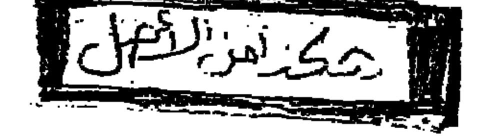


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Close up

Salama A. Salama

The concrete strand

We Egyptians, our hands full of the splendours of nature, given to us by God, simply squander the riches at our disposal. Stupidity, the lack of any clear goal and bad planning have all joined forces to turn the incomparably beautiful northern coast, with its fine white sand and blue waves, unparalleled among Mediterranean shores, into a noisy strip of cement blocks, crowded holiday barracks with meaningless foreign or Arab names. Contractors do all they can to attract the hard-earned money of Egyptians sweating it out in the Gulf states, and convert investments into palaces and villas for the new wealthy and the fat cats, or chalets and blocks of flats packed onto a narrow asphalt ribbon behind these palaces, occupied for two months of the year. For the ten remaining months, these hollow dwellings are deserted and left to the vagaries of humidity, wind and sand.

According to expert estimates, the money invested in these projects during the past ten years amounts to tens of billions of pounds — not to mention the sums spent by the government for creating the infrastructure.

To this day, no precise plans have been drawn up to cover building and investment in this vast area, stretching from Alexandria to Marsa Matrouh. In apparent disregard for the decree recently issued by the Council of Ministers to redesign the north coast, construction work continues apace, in contravention of every imaginable rule and law. Even local rules prohibiting construction along the sea front — no less than 200 metres away from the sea — are flouted with impunity. This distance has rapidly diminished to 50 metres or less, since high-ranking government officials and other influential people have decided to build their palaces and luxurious villas directly on the sea front, thus cutting off the sight of the sea and its breezes from the unfortunate, less influential members of the public.

With no trace of long-term planning, about 76 holiday villages have been built along the coast. These are bounded by the highway to the south and surrounded by the desert on all sides, sprinkled with odd fig trees and mounds of refuse from the holiday villages, and a few farms and houses built with sacking or mud, belonging to Bedouins of the region. The highway seems to divide the population. The upper layer occupies the coastal strip during the summer months, blessed with electricity, running potable water, telephones and services, whilst the lower layer ekes out a marginal existence, literally across the street. This is why the coastal villages have no real substance; they can never become real cities, and can never resemble the towns built along the coast throughout the Mediterranean world; nor do these villages fulfil their developmental objective, which was to relieve the pressure on the Nile Valley.

Every summer, I drive down this highway, which stretches for miles along the Northern Coast, and all along the coast, I see huge blocks of buildings growing steadily to my right, blocking out the view of the sea; to my left, on the other side of the highway, poverty and aridity flourish. I always wonder why the developers, innocent of the slightest trace of foresight or vision, are unable to exploit this golden strand in a more sensitive way without compromising the integrity of the landscape, in a manner similar to that employed by the European states across the Mediterranean. What sort of exploitation can this be? How can a poor country like Egypt squander fortunes on concrete forests which are only lived in for a few weeks? The flow of money is equalled only by the flood of publicity for the luxurious units in this forsaken paradise.

There are many ways to rescue the northern coast and redevelop it before it is too late, in a more economical and more suitable style which will be of greater use in the long term — on condition that it is not left to the people responsible for the present situation. They have managed to ruin this area in the firm conviction that they are doing a fine job.

Soapbox

Equity first

The parliamentary bloc of Tagammu, led by Khaled Mohieddin voted against Law 96 of 1992, which subjects the rental of agricultural lands to civil law and terminates existing contracts between land-owners and tenants. The party proposed an alternative policy for the regulation of landlord-tenant relations, seeking to reconcile contradictory interests and ensure the stability of agricultural productivity, a fundamental component of the Egyptian economy. The Tagammu bloc presented several draft laws to this end. For five years, the People's Assembly ignored these proposals, summed up in the following points:

The status quo, currently planned to end in October 1997, must be maintained; tenants must not be evicted as long as their legal commitments have been fulfilled, as stipulated in the lease contract.

Rents must be reviewed every three years; increase of rents must be based on net profit from agricultural produce.

A fund to finance tenants wishing to purchase agricultural land must be set up; payment would be settled immediately at market price, or by instalments over a period of no less than 20 years at soft interest rates, compatible with net profits.

Tenants should be provided with new arable land in recently reclaimed areas prior to their eviction from the land they are required to hand over.

An equitable and balanced solution is possible. Dealing with the problem from the security viewpoint will have negative results, particularly since it will affect no fewer than one million tenants, with no means of subsistence or employment other than farming.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a leading member of the left-wing Tagammu Party. **Abdel-Ghafar Shukr**

Bombs and bulldozers

One cannot expect a people without statehood to act like well-dressed diplomats talking about abstract notions, writes Edward Said. We must begin by re-stating the basic premise that peace will only prevail when land is given back, and that the goal is independence and statehood for two peoples in Palestine

It has taken almost exactly four years for the Oslo peace process inexorably to peel off its cosmetic wrappings in order to reveal the stark truth hidden at its core: there was no peace agreement, only an agreement to keep Israeli hegemony over the Palestinian territories safeguarded by hypocritical rhetoric and military power. In this, as I have been saying for a long time, there was a lamentable Palestinian failure to judge Israeli motives — especially under Labour — and to preserve a degree of skepticism. Instead we entered an appalling spiral of loss and humiliation, gulled by the United States and the media into thinking that we had at last achieved some measure of respectability and acceptance, bludgeoned by Israel into accepting its pathological definitions of security and dialogue, all of which has impoverished our people whose per capita income has been slashed by half; we have lost our ability to move around freely, confined to the dreadful little Bantustans (about three per cent of the West Bank) that we insist on calling liberated zones, obliged to watch more settlements being built and more land taken, more houses destroyed, more people evicted, and sadistic collective punishments meted out without proportion or reason.

Western liberals must remember that Oslo was not a *tabula rasa*: it came after 26 years of Israeli military occupation and before that, 19 years of Palestinian dispossession, exile, oppression. If Israel has all along insisted that it is not responsible for what has been visited on the Palestinian people since 1948, then it should explain to us why we, alone of all people, should forget the past, remain uncompensated, our travails unacknowledged, even as all other victims of injustice have the right to reparations, apologies, and the like. There is no logic to that, only the cold, hard, narcissistic indifference of amoral power.

I have not heard one Palestinian applaud or even mildly approve the marketplace bombs of last week. They were stupid, criminal acts that have brought disaster on our people. Yet the media and the Israeli and the US governments, united with Micronesia in the UN (a marvellous alliance that) have insisted that Palestinian terror and violence be stopped. Even the all-purpose Amos Oz has demanded that we decide between peace and violence, as if Israel had grounded its planes, dismantled Dimona, stopped bombing and occupying south Lebanon (two 70-year-old Lebanese men were killed by Israeli planes at the time of the marketplace bombings: why is that not violence and terror?), and withdrawn all its troops out of the 97 per cent of the West Bank it still controls, along with the military checkpoints that it has planted between every major Palestinian centre. Israel and its American supporters have rarely troubled themselves with any of these facts, which Israel is entitled to fabricate on the ground and in the media as it suits its purposes.

Neither of the two suicide bombers has been identified; neither, it is practically certain, came from the Palestinian territories; no recognisable party or group has claimed credible responsibility for the crime. On the contrary, Israel in its mania for security, has retained control of every exit and entrance into the territories, and *it* alone is responsible for West Jerusalem, where the attack took place. How dare the egregious Netanyahu and the chorus of his American minions demand that Islamic militants be summarily arrested, and Israeli security be guaranteed? Who does he think he is addressing as his bonded servant and by what standards of human decency does he dare assume that the hundreds of Palestinians murdered during the Intifada, the victims of the Sabra and Shatila massacres — all of them directly the responsibility of Israel — are nothing compared to Israel's "security" needs? Only a few weeks ago the Israeli justice system ruled unilaterally that victims of Israel's military during the Intifada were not entitled to pursue their claims against the state since it was a "war" situation. Who do those people think they are that they can make light of or ignore what they have done to us and still wrap themselves in the mantle of "the survivors." Is there no term limit, is there no sense of respect for the victims' victims, is there no barrier to what Israel can do and continue to demand the privileges of the innocent?

As Anthony Lewis put it on 11 August in the *New York Times*, Israel holds most of the cards; to blame the Palestinians for every misfortune or incident inside Israel is to jumble up blame with illusion. He is absolutely right, and right also to admit that there isn't much hope for peace in such circumstances. I have been unsparing in my criticism of Arafat and his associates for what they have done during the past five years: now, I must say, I concur fully with his policy *of refusing to negotiate on "security"* as Israel defines it (i.e. rounding up "Islamic" suspects to Israel's satisfaction) until Israel fulfils the terms of Oslo that it has so far either blatantly violated or simply brushed off. When Bill Clinton and Mrs Albright repeat the formula now used as frontline propaganda by the Israeli lobby "there is no equivalent between bombs and bulldozers" they need to explain to a recently evicted Palestinian family or Palestinians under curfew, or Palestinians whose houses have been destroyed, or whose young men and women languish in Israeli jails, or who are strip-searched by Israeli soldiers, or driven out of Jerusalem so that Russian Jews can be settled in their homes, or killed in massacres, or deprived of any right to resist Israeli occupation policies, what is the equivalent of an Israeli-American bulldozer in such a context?

There is a simple racist premise underpinning the "peace process" and subsequent rhetorical ambushes set in its name that Palestinian and Arab lives aren't worth as much as Israeli Jewish lives. Last year, when 100 Lebanese civilians hiding in a UN shelter were deliberately targeted and killed by Israeli jets and helicopter gunships, there was no Israeli apology, no demand from the US that Israel should curb its bombers, no willingness even to accept the UN secretary-general's report. Is there any real meaning to this nonsensical charade? How can the US and its army of former Israeli lobbyists who now are in charge of the "peace process" still continue to pretend that they are somehow for "peace" and can be even-handed negotiators?

The only peace worth its name is an exchange of land for peace on the basis of rough parity between the two sides. There can be no peace without some genuine attempt on the part of Israel and its powerful supporters to take a step towards the people they have wronged, a step they must take in humility and reconciliation not in clever talk and cruel behaviour. Very few of us want back everything we lost in 1948, but we do want some acknowledgement of what we lost and of Israel's role in that mass dispossession, which so many of Israel's new historians have themselves excavated with courage and assiduity. Many Palestinians do not want to return to their land, but they do ask: Why is it that any Jew anywhere has the theoretical right of return, whereas we have none at all?

And Israel's citizens and its friends need to ask themselves openly whether they think that Israel can go on abusing and humiliating Palestinians, showing contempt for Arabs, flaunting its brazen actions before the world and at the same time enjoy real recognition and acceptance. The sad fact is that both the US and Israel are so out of touch with Arab actualities, so enamoured of clichés about Islamic terror and Arab radicalism and anti-Semitism, that they seem to have missed the fact that Arabs want peace, that Palestinians want also to lead a decent life of independence and democracy as much as the common Israeli or American. Why then lay up stores of resentment and hatred that will surely delay peace for Israelis and Arabs for years more?

Terror bombing is terrible, and it cannot be condoned. But the bulldozers of forgetfulness and righteous arrogance are terrible also: Israel's constant demands for security conceal, I think, a deep insecurity about Israel's "original sin." The fact that there was always another people in Palestine, and that every village, kibbutz, settlement, city and town had an Arab history also. Dayan used to admit it publicly. This generation of leaders hasn't his honesty. The worst are Israel's lobby and the scads of pro-Israeli organisations in the US who repeat the dreadful clichés and celebrate Israel without a trace of awareness that there is tragedy beneath every road, every act of military prowess, every settlement. What sort of hypocrisy is it to rail against Islamic fundamentalism and to say nothing of Jewish fundamentalism that dehumanises every non-Jew and relies on Biblical promises that go back two millennia?

To mouth phrases about getting the negotiations going in such a context is to play King Canute, as if only State Department planners and Israeli policymakers are capable of defining history and reality. The air needs to be cleared, language shorn of its worn-out phrases, honesty and simple fairness given a chance. Yes, Palestinians want peace, but not at any price and not the way Netanyahu and company define it, with millions of conditions concealing an iron, unbending rejection of the desire for Palestinian equality. People respond to a call for justice and the end of fear and oppression, not to the lumbering heaviness of something called a "peace process" in which Israel has all the advantages (plus a nuclear arsenal) and demands that Palestinians are there only to give it "security".

I fear that at present the atmosphere is too inflamed by lies, too corrupted by illusions and self-fulfilling incapacities to allow us all to move forward. But a start needs to be made somewhere and somehow, blame apportioned properly and responsibility assigned proportionately. One cannot always expect a people without statehood, without rights, without hope, to act like well-dressed diplomats sitting in seminar rooms talking about scenarios and confidence-building measures as so many abstractions. What we need now — and certainly the US can take the step — is a re-statement of the basic premise that there is peace only when land is given back, and that the goal is independence and statehood for two peoples in Palestine. Start from that, and it might be possible to move towards the goal in as many steps as are necessary. But one cannot expect peace and security while Palestinians continue to suffer and not one word is said about the causes of that suffering.

To The Editor

Revered scholar

Sir- Re: David Blanks' article, "Learning where to go" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, issue 335):

Sheikh Sha'rawi's religious programmes are popular because he is a revered scholar who, by his lucid interpretations, helps the simple faithful to better understand the spiritual values and the doctrines of Islam.

To compare him with the entertainment of the *moulids* is to be unfairly biased or, given the benefit of the doubt, to lack knowledge of true Islam.

Incidentally, there is no "official Islam".

Mohamed Hussein Salim
Alexandria

No ethnic issue

Sir- In his article "The rise of ethnicity" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 31 July-6 August), Mohamed Sid-Ahmed said he "would have preferred discussing the problems touching on the Egyptian Copts in Egypt itself". Though I couldn't agree more, nothing of the sort ever happens. We always pretend that everything is all right.

The fact is that Egyptian Copts do have the feeling that they are being treated as second-class citizens. But let me assure you that this has nothing to do with the rise of ethnicity in underdeveloped countries or elsewhere, for Copts are by no means an ethnic group or minority and their long-standing history, which is often ignored in textbooks, provides irrefutable evidence of this fact.

The Copts have always rejected foreign intervention in their affairs because they believe that any solution for their problems must come from within. The feelings of Copts are often exacerbated by certain practices on the part of either the government or the general public. Let me cite just a few examples.

Even though the Egyptian Constitution stipulates that freedom of worship is guaranteed for all, the Copts are not completely free to build churches, for instance. A presidential decree — often impossible to obtain — is a prerequisite for building a new church or even making minor repairs to an old one. The appointment of Christians to high-ranking positions, including higher education institutions, is often very restricted. Slogans such as 'the crescent and the cross' are fine, but they are certainly not enough to solve problems.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Assiut

Manipulated watch

Sir- The report in *Al-Ahram Weekly* on the findings of the Washington-based Human Rights Watch Group on the situation in Bahrain seems to be a demonstration of the way in which such well-intentioned groups can be manipulated. It is certainly important that the actions of governments towards their peoples should be monitored, but it is equally important that the true state of affairs be reflected, and that dissident groups not be allowed to distort facts. That seems to be what happened in the case of the Bahrain report.

The basic mistake is accepting an untrue picture of the everyday situation in the country, where unemployment is below 10 per cent and where arbitrary arrests never occur — people are only taken into custody if they are directly suspected of some crime, and are then protected by the due process of law.

It is also a mistake to ascribe political objectives to those who have recently been guilty of acts of terrorism in Bahrain. The dissidents there do not have any political programme, or even demands which could be discussed with the concerned authorities; their objective is merely to spread chaos, disrupt the life of the state, and force the security forces to take drastic measures which can then be portrayed as oppression.

It is a remarkable fact that the vast majority of the population of Bahrain, both native and non-native, have urged the government to take stronger action against those trouble-makers, as they interfere with the ordinary enjoyment of life of all the people living in the country. Citizens are conscious that they have a higher standard of living than most of those in nearby countries, as United Nations figures have shown, though this reality is never acknowledged by the monitoring groups. Thus, average per capita income in Bahrain is $15,500 a year, compared to $4,500 in most Arab countries, and no more than $15,000 in the industrialised countries; life expectancy in Bahrain is 72 years, against 62.1 in other Arab countries, and 73.3 in the industrialised world.

Other figures show that between 1967 and 1990 BD550 million had been spent on public housing projects, benefiting about 52,979 families; 97 per cent of all children are being inoculated against disease, and infant mortality has fallen from 55 per 1,000 in 1955 to 19 per 1,000 in 1995.

Expenditure on schools and teachers accounts for half of all spending on social services and all education in the country is completely free.

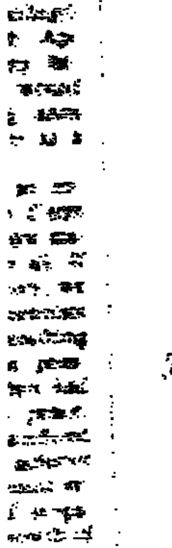
Against these positive aspects, so often ignored or misrepresented, are the facts known about the dissident groups, that have been shown to rely on suspect foreign sources for their funds. The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain for instance, has an office in Tehran, and with the funds it has received from the Revolutionary Guards there, has sent arms worth approximately $120,000 to Bahrain. Again, the so-called Bahrain Hizbollah originally formed in the holy Iranian city of Qom, has been found to have been responsible for the majority of the acts of violence in Bahrain.

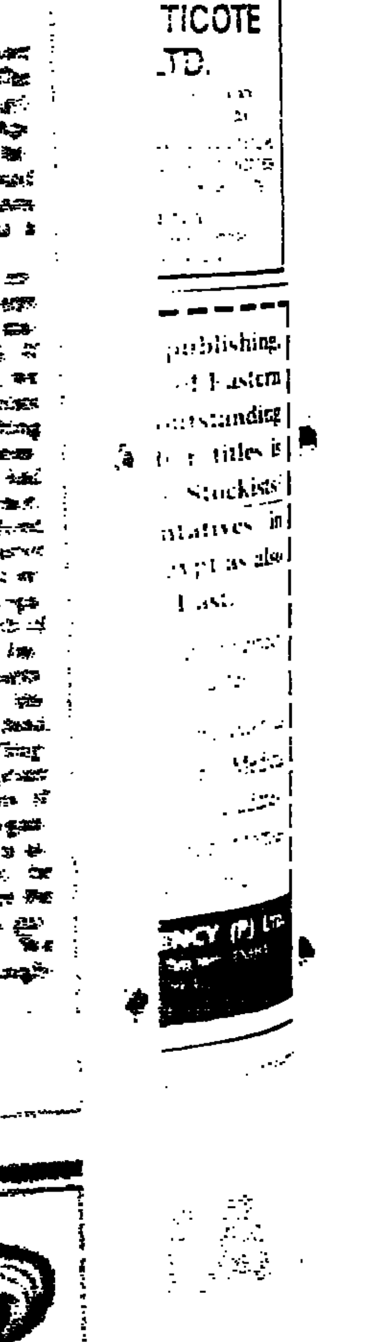
Yet, in spite of the violent incidents perpetrated by a small number of people fomenting unrest in the country, Bahrain has pressed ahead with the application of an authentic form of Gulf and Islamic democracy. Thus, the number of members of the Majlis Al-Shura has been increased from 30 to 40, representing all sectors of the society. More than 80 per cent of the recommendations of the Majlis have been accepted by the government. One of the committees formed by the Majlis oversees all legal affairs, with the result that the authorities complete all investigations as quickly as possible, and hence the innocent are speedily set free, those sent for trial are allowed to see their families and consult their lawyers, and trials are fair. Terrorists actions have been responsible for the death of 41 people in Bahrain and millions of dollars worth of damage has been perpetrated through arson and wanton vandalism, yet sentences in recent trials varied only from one to five-year's imprisonment.

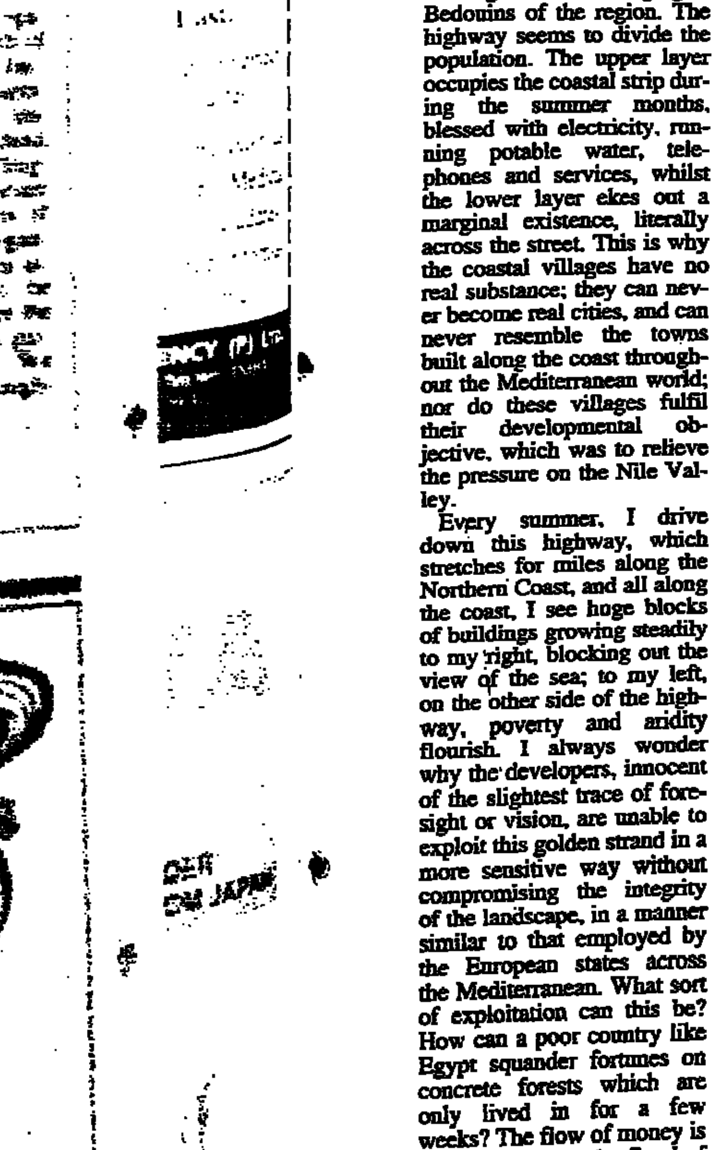
It must also be remembered that the concept of human rights is not the same in the Arab or Islamic world as it is in the West, with the emphasis on organised political parties, a parliamentary opposition, and so on. These are not things which the violent opponents of the Bahrain government seek to achieve. Rather, they aim to halt Bahrain's steady economic progress, deter the growing numbers of Arab tourists who flock to the island, and draw attention to their own existence.

The conclusion must be that the aim of dissidents fomenting unrest in Bahrain is part of an overall strategy aimed at spreading instability throughout the Gulf region, affecting all the Arab states of the area. It must be recognised that the security of Bahrain does not affect that country alone, but through the Gulf Cooperation Council has an impact on its neighbours as well, and, because of the strategic importance of the region, is of concern to the whole world. This has certainly been recognised by the American and British governments, which have expressed their support of Bahrain's government in unequivocal terms, while emphasising their commitment to human rights throughout the whole globe.

Omar Al-Hassan
Chairman of the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies
Manama
Bahrain









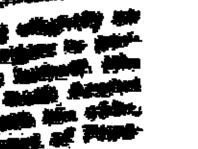



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Playing atop the city

The Ninth Citadel Festival for Music and Song, under the direction of Sherif Mohieddin, opened on 10 August and will run for ten days. This year's event will take place in three separate auditoriums, all within the Citadel complex and including the massive El-Mahka stage. Hopefully, the amplification problems evident at last year's performances will have been ironed out, so not everything will be gone with the wind. Entrance to all events is free, and some of the programme will be repeated in the Open Air Theatre of the Cairo Opera House.

Programme:

14 Aug: [illegible] *15 Aug:* [illegible] *17 Aug:* [illegible] *11pm Sayed Makkawi performs on the oud. 18 Aug: 7.30pm Songs by Amr Yehia and Akram El-Sharkawy; 8.30pm Violinist Jaqueline Mouca Kamal; 9.30pm Cairo Chamber Orchestra with Jaqueline Mouca Kamal; 9.30pm Cairo Chamber Orchestra with Jaqueline Mouca Kamal, Rehab Shakr (percussion) and Mohamed Nour El-Din (violin). 11pm Arabic Music Ensemble. 19 Aug: 7.30pm Jazz with Saad Orchestra; 8.30pm Songs by Salwa Abu Geresha; 9.30pm Nour wal Amal; 11pm the Sharara Sextet. 20 Aug: 7.30pm Cairo Opera Orchestra Brass Quintet; 8.30pm Songs by Amr Yehia and Akram El-Sharkawy; 9.30pm Jazz with Yehia Khalil; 11pm Cairo Festival Orchestra with Yasser El-Serafi, violin, Nesma Abdel-Aziz, percussion.*

Music

The wind prevails

David Blake attends to the calling of tunes

Yehia Khalil

Up or down, at the Citadel of Salah El-Din, or in the Open Air Theatre of the Cairo Opera House, it is the wind that wins. Cairo is not a windy city, certainly not in the way that Seattle is, or Wellington, New Zealand. It is hardly ever assaulted by gales but it does have prevailing breezes, its very own zephyrs, which blow at night, during the concert hours. The winds are mostly gentle, a heavenly boon to the hordes of summer. But the breezes stroke the music up into the air, above the festivals. The problem is solved by the gods — play it or sing it, bellow it or swing it, most of it quickly goes into the void.

Listening must be quick and right on the note. The catching time is short. The concerts resemble little else so much as watching a film on fast forward. Relaxed and slow, or instant flash, you do not get time to ponder. Almost everything goes.

The concert of 10 August in the Cairo Opera House Open Air Theatre featured Yehia Khalil and his jazz band. They took off in a bolt of positively abrasive noise, but the noise had colour, sonority and depth. It was brash, but far from vulgar. Vulgarity, of course, can be perfectly nice, but it does not go with jazz. It is quite another listen.

Jazz is not pop. Like some other forms of music, Bach for example, it remains intent on keeping its options open. Khalil knows this, and cleverly stays under cover. However far he strays from the holy writs of jazz he stays in the family. Thus is his dignity preserved.

There is no programme of set pieces, and the concert becomes a kind of creative listening. The master himself announces the players, all virtuosos. The sound cleaves the seething, sticky air like iced steel. It is refreshing, a rare pleasure on an August night. Some complain about the intensity of the noise and its lack of variety. And true, Khalil sticks to the same decibel level, though its colour changes. The colours involved in the staging also change. There is coloured smoke aplenty. There is multi-coloured fogs whose effect is really quite subtle. We listen as if in an aquarium of floating colour, fresh lettuce green and sapphire blue.

There are breaks in the music and then it begins as it finishes. It could go on forever. The audience is capacity. They are mostly young, rather ordinary people, who are both appreciative and knowing. Khalil has an audience willing to pay to come in. And what they come to listen to is Cairo's own sound. It is inventive and imaginative, and if you can take the ear bashing it gradually grows on you. Cairo, after all, could well be the world's noisiest city, and in such a context Khalil fits rather snugly.

From out of a fog that may well stand in for genuine petrol fumes, Khalil plays percussion. There are no star players, and some move around as they work. The lead guitarist is a show to himself — pill-box hat, floppy clothes, he is laconic and his music indefatigable. He wanders around like a street musician, relaxing. The pianist is great. He paints up every effect that arrives in the music with the kind of energy and dedication that could benefit a great many classical pianists. The clapping to the rhythms becomes louder. The show has taken off, and become jazzy.

After an intermission something strange occurs. The level of the concert changed. We were into shadow, and a restless sense of power. But power of what? The drums were muffled, almost like a call to battle. Something had arrived without warning.

The music began, an oft-repeated phrase of a song. By whom? For whom? For whose voice? The composition was clever. Landscape was hinted at, but who was to occupy it? Guess who? The audience guessed. It was Um Kalthoum, the greatest icon of them all. This was an arrangement of one of her songs. The audience was on to her before me. The clapping gave way to an insistent stamping sound, and an audible catching of breath.

The long, slow run up to the climactic utterance had the audience in thrall. And it was all there, even the cry. The audience was tremendous, but sotto voce. No noise for this one. This audience was barely born when Kalthoum died. The myth, though, is inextinguishable. She might as well be holy and immaculate, and still she can wear the dark glasses she invented for mere celebrities.

The music continued, through aspects of jazz that invoked Rome and the voice of Bricktop, and the real Windsors stepping out on the dance floor.

Yehia Khalil can be great. He presents legends that sting the mind.

The Ninth Citadel Festival for Music and Song at the Salah El-Din Citadel is a precipitous event. Not only does the Citadel's El-Mahka stage rest on the craggy roof of Cairo, looking over the endless acres of the city, it is itself part of a complex that includes two other theatres, enclosed in the bosom of the fort. They all opened together on the evening of the 10 August.

The two smaller theatres open at 7.30pm and 8.30pm respectively, while the cavernous El-Mahka stages two shows nightly, at 9.30pm and, according to the programme 11pm, though 11.30pm might be a more reasonable estimate.

This explosion of festival activity continues until 20 August. There is, then, much to see on the hill. Many items on the programme will be repeated in the Open Air Theatre at the Opera House, meaning that both venues will be fully active.

There are, though, problems that effect the listeners. In the hot conditions of mid-summer. To make it to the roof of the city through the pulsating streets can become a marathon of daunting discomfort. It is all too easy to arrive hassled and careworn, which is not the best mood in which to face the music. And although, in a democratic nod, the organisers have this year laid on buses, their schedule is something of a mystery.

The chief difficulty, though, is the wind. What seems to be no more than a breeze downstairs turns out to be a gale upstairs. It sweeps through the large auditorium like a storm, defying amplifiers and carrying away most of the music. It needs a daring, imaginative architect to construct a sonic shelter-space up here. Were he or she to be found, Cairo would have a miracle theatre along the lines of the Herod Atticus in Athens.

All this activity is under the direction of Sherif Mohieddin, the founder-conductor of the Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra, which, in augmented emanation, plays for the duration under the title Festival Orchestra.

On 11 August they premiered in the Open Air Theatre of the Opera House, a lovely space suited to summer concerts of the more vigorous type. Folklore, jazz, pop — it can accommodate them all — but for the quieter, reflective music that comprised the programme of the 11th it simply does not do. The prevailing north wind is destructive to strings and chamber orchestra quality. Yet it was precisely these that comprised the programme, and the results were sadly predictable.

Nice to know for sure that Mahmoud Osman is a caring and sharply defined conductor. Nice to know, too, that the players of the orchestra feel this.

They offered Schubert minuets and trios, followed by Dragonetti's Andante in B major for string orchestra. The results were mixed. Soft piano means no piano at all. The Boccherini Cello concerto in B major, one movement only, with Rami Yehia as soloist, had a bit of luck. The zephyrs quietened, only to resurrect themselves for Telemann's Concerto for violin in G major that followed.

The player, Khaled Hussein, was strong and direct. The instrument stood up to the breeze because the player sensed what would happen. The strings of the orchestra, though, were wiped clean from the picture. Vivaldi followed, a concerto for two violins, with Yasser Nabil and Karim Fouda. This was the best presented item of the concert. The orchestra was excellent, not least because they were audible. These classic pieces are basic to the string orchestra, though it is hard on an audience when most of the sound is blown away.

Up in the hills there is no entry fee. It is free for all comers. Down in the Opera House it is half empty. Predictably, perhaps — why pay for a hole in the musical fabric when you can get it all, better presented, upstairs, and for free. But ask the wind god if he is blowing the night you choose to go. Maybe he will be polite enough to blow out someone else's concert.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Gamal God Mielka
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.
Recent paintings and sculpture by an Egyptian artist now resident in Italy.

Ebada El-Zoheiry (Works in ink)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily noon-10pm. Until 14 August.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassaan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawy, Hisham El-Zeany, Hussein Sharif, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by Tahiya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Morsi, Salem Salah, George Bahgory, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgouri, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city. Elegant, airy, and with pleasant garden cafe.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.



Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Indian Films
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162.
14 August, 4.30pm: Coofi
18 August, 4.30pm: Inderjeet

The Indian Cultural centre continues its summer season of Amitab Bachchan's films.

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/392 5162/3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Anaconda
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

101 Dalmatians
Odeon I, Abdel Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Glen Close as Cruella de Vil in Walt Disney's latest blockbuster.

Mars Attacks
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya, El-Horreya Mall, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily, 10.30 am
With Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close and Danny De Vito.

Liar Liar
El-Horreya, El-Horreya Mall, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
For one day attorney Jim Carrey can only tell the truth.

The English Patient
Odeon III, Abdel Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Willem Dafoe, Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche in the nine Oscar award-winning adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's novel.

Two Much
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Antonio Banderas, Melanie Griffith and Daryl Hannah.

The Crucible
Odeon II, Abdel Hamid Said st., Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Film adaptation of Arthur Miller's play with Daniel Day-Lewis.

Double Team
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke.

Three Wishes
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Patrick Swayze, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio and Joseph Mazzello.

Hazzemni Ya...
Cinema Cairo, Saray El-Azbekiyya, downtown. Tel 574 5350. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Fifi Abduh's belly-dancing stage hit transferred to the screen.

Tuffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

The Woman and the Cleaver
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & Thur-Sat, midnight.
Nabila Ebeid's latest venture involves the hacking to pieces of men.

MUSIC

Citadel Music Festival
For full programme, see photo caption on this page

Egyptian Folk Music School
Mubarak Public Library, 4, El-Tahawiya Street, off El-Nil Street, Giza. 15 August, 7.30 pm
A concert by the young musicians who form the Pro Helvetica-supported Egyptian Folk Music School. Admission is free.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 14 August 9pm.

Song Recital — Tarek El-Tohami
Open Air Theatre, Opera House as above. 15 August, 9pm.

Alexandrian Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 16 August, 9pm.
Conducted by Sherif Mohieddin.

Brass Quintet Cairo Opera Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 17 August, 9pm.

El-Nur wal Amal Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above 18 August, 9pm.
Conducted by Ahmed Abul Eid.

Cairo Chamber Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 19 August, 9pm.
Conducted by Sherif Mohieddin.

Said El-Artist
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 18 August, 9pm.
Performance by the percussionist.

THEATRE

Toqous El-Esharat Wel-Tahawolat (Rites of Signs and Transformations)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily, 9pm.
Scripted by Saadallah Wanis, directed by Hassan El-Wakil, starring Nabil El-Halafawi, Sawsan Badr and Hamdi El-Wazir.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi and starring all the family members of the televised series.

Babiool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm exc Fri, 8.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 10 pm.
With Hala Sedqi, Farouq El-Fishawi and Ezzat El-Alayli; directed by Essam El-Sayed.

A'lim Gutneadi (The World of Guineadi)
Small Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9pm.
Musical directed Fawzi El-Meligbi, score by Tarek Abbas

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

El-Mahzala (The Farce)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.
Youssef Idris play revived with Sherine, Omar El-Hariri and Tarek El-Dessouqi; directed by Shaker Abdel-Latif

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Sameh Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi and a contingent of Russian ballet dancers; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yoghurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm, exc Mon & Fri, 8pm
Sayed Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Ta'm El-Kalam (The Taste of Words)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10 pm
Abdullah Mahmoud, Farouk Nagrib and Manal Salama, directed by Hossam El-Din Saleh.

Malek Wala Kitabah (Heads of Tails)
Small Hall, El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 8pm
Mustafa Saad directs Medhat Morsi and Salwa Osman in his own play.

Leila Foul (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. For times check with venue.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and singer Ahmed Ibrahim in a light musical.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by
Injy El-Kashef

Around the galleries



Ihab Shaker

IN A NEW move planned, no doubt to heighten the profile of contemporary Egyptian art overseas, Khan El-Maghraby has organised an exhibition of more than 80 works by some of Egypt's leading contemporary artists that will be exhibited in Hammersmith, London. Among those taking part in the month-long exhibition are **Ahmed Nawar, Gamil Shafik, George Bahgory, Tahiya Halim** and, pictured, **Ihab Shaker**, who contributes a rhythmic and slightly nostalgic study of three tarboosh-wearing musicians, perfectly capturing the faintly seedy glamour of the period when such musical trios were a standard feature of nightclubs and cabarets.

*Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri***

Take your pick

Food glorious, and some not quite so glorious, food: Nehad Selaiha samples the theatrical summer fare


Adel Imam in The Leader


Fifi Abduh in Cream and Honey

After weeks of relative theatrical dearth, suddenly there is a glut of theatre. A cursory look at the billboards might suggest to a stranger that we are a nation of gluttons; they sport such mouth-watering titles as "Cream and Honey", with the delectable Fifi Abduh as the main dish and Galal El-Sharqawi as the chef, "Two Lobsters", with Hanan Shawqi and Farida Seif El-Nasr as the two delicious aquatic creatures sought after by comedian Yunis Shalabi, and "Cabbage, Yogurt", a kind of light salad served by comedian Ahmad Bedeer, with belly-dancer Nagwa Fouad providing most of the yogurt. For afters, you could try a dish of *Dalouze* (a squelchy kind of cooked sweet pudding) and wash it down with *Wahid Lamoon* (A Glass of Lemonade) specially prepared by comedian Mohamed Negm with the help of the sexy Aida Ryad.

If your gastronomic imagination is tickled by such titles and you decide to indulge your taste buds, you will have to reach deep into your pocket; such commercial theatrical fare comes very expensive, with tickets starting at LE70 or 80 and rocketing up to over LE200. You will also need to have a very strong digestion, a sturdy behind and heaps of patience. In most cases you are likely to end up with a long, rambling evening with nothing to alleviate the thickening pall of boredom but endless servings of a lumpy, stodgy rehash of stock characters and situations, insipid, hackneyed jokes and sloppy or ham acting, garnished with a lot of pointless dancing of indifferent quality and doused with garish music.

You will be on much safer grounds with some of last year's shows, like Adel Imam's "The Leader", or Samir El-Asfouri's *Ballo*, which are having a second run. Better still, if you can afford it, you could try El-Asfouri's new star-studded adaptation of the famous British musical *Cats* which he rechristened "A World of Cats". You should not, however, go expecting to hear any of Andrew Lloyd Webber's original score or find a trace of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum' Book of Practical Cats* which formed the basis of the British musical and provided its lyrics. Only the very slim plot about selecting a cat to ascend to heaven to be reborn was preserved by El-Asfouri and given a socio-political gloss. The new score for the Egyptian *Cats* comes from Ammar El-Sherei'y and the lyrics from Sayyed Hegab. Still it is a big production, and with two film stars at the head of the cast (the aptly named Pussy and Maali Zayed) plus singer Mohamed El-Hilw, it promises to be the most spectacular production this season.

You will also be in safe hands if you opt for any of the three Lenin El-Ramli plays currently on show: "The Madness of Humans" (the title in Arabic, which is *Gunoon El-Bashar*, vividly suggests, in terms of sound, the mad-cow disease), "May It Turn Out For The Best" or, better still, his "Goodbye Gentlemen", a hilarious and scathingly satirical sci-fi sequel to his previous hit "Welcome Gentlemen". In this sequel we are jolted into the future, rather than the past, and confronted with a prophecy of doom and gloom about the future of the Third World in general and the Arab world in particular. However, the theatricality of the piece, its spectacular effects, together with El-Ramli's nimble humour and agile dialogue make the evening quite enjoyable despite the depressingly pessimistic vision the play puts across. An added virtue of "Goodbye Gentlemen" is that it is a National Theatre production and can, therefore, be enjoyed at the moderate prices charged by the state-theatre.

Other interesting state-funded productions which combine comedy with a serious message and are easy on the pocket are Yusuf Idris's "World Farce" at El-Salaam Theatre and "The Taste of Words" and "Heads or Tails" at El-Tali'a. Those in search of light and undemanding relief — and let's face it, this is what the Arab tourist market most covets — are, however, warned to stay off these: the first and last have too much philosophical reflection and technical innovation to rate as light entertainment and the second has no stars in the cast and is too openly and seriously political to fit the standard summer bill.

But if you happen to be one of those people who relish serious drama whatever the season and can be only entertained when they are deeply challenged, you should take yourself immediately to Al-Hanagar Centre and catch its production of Sa'dallah Wannus's "The Rites of Signs and Transformations" before it is taken off to hand the theatre over to the board of the Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre at the beginning of September. Some may say that compared to the Lebanese production of the same play, which visited Cairo in May and played for a week at the National, the Egyptian production looks timid, pallid and seriously lacking in passion, intellectual daring and technical brilliance. Still, there is the text to enjoy, despite the director's deplorable pruning and many unforgivable omissions, and some good naturalistic acting from Nabil El-Halafawi and Sawsan Badr. If you ignore the atrocious set and costumes, the forced musical interludes, the slack, careless tempo and occasional bouts of overacting and declamation, you can still be thrilled by Wannus's dramatic energy, linguistic vigour and ruthlessly honest dissection of the Arab cultural heritage. Watching "The Rites" at Al-Hanagar, I became convinced that as a text it can survive the worst of productions while still preserving its integrity and impact.

Soul on fire

Gamal Nkrumah remembers Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, whose death marks the close of a poignant chapter in Nigerian history



"The protection of one's privacy is a Western and bourgeois concept. It's a trick to protect one's loot and booty. I have nothing to hide, or to show off. No appointment needs to be made. My friends just drop in to see me when they feel like it"

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Africa's most controversial musician, was born in the south-western Nigerian city of Abeokuta on 15 October, 1938. Fela died on Saturday 2 August, aged 58. Honouring his memory, Nigeria's first private radio station, Ray Power 100, played Fela's music all day long.

Fela led a life untouched by the Western moral codes and social mores which had been laid down by the departed British colonial authorities and the Christian missionaries that were prevalent in West Africa in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. He behaved in a manner that African society as a whole had rejected, but his shocking antics did nothing to lessen his popular appeal. Fela was a trendsetter and cut a bit of dash in everything he did.

Fela won international acclaim. In Paris, former French culture minister Jack Lang described Fela as a "Prince of Freedom." Lang told reporters that Fela "remains, by his vibrant work and by his freedom of thought, a strong symbol for new generations." In Africa Fela was an icon — he was loved and respected for his music and its political symbolism. "For us he was a monument, a reference point," Congolese singer Lokua Kanza told reporters in Paris. The African masses loved his style and charisma. They appreciated the way he put across a political message, ridiculing Nigeria's rich and powerful elite.

Fela did not shy away from apportioning blame. The sources of Africa's ills were military dictatorship and the colonial legacy. *Army Agreement* and *Vagabond in Power* were among his anti-Nigerian junta hit songs.

A dark horse, Fela followed his heart rather than his head. He hated hypocrisy and refused to pander to the powerful. He turned down offers to serve as minister of culture by several of Nigeria's military rulers. "I would rather someone give it to me straight than pussyfoot around," Fela told me in an interview in New York in August 1986, just after his release from a Nigerian jail.

Fela's most recent arrest was on 7 April when he and over 100 members of his entourage, including several of his many wives, were arrested at his nightclub for smoking marijuana by Nigeria's anti-narcotics police squad. At the time of his release, a couple of months later, he looked ill. For those of us who remember Fela for his lean good looks, the sight of the 58-year-old heart-throb emaciated and dying of AIDS came as a terrible shock.

Fela had no faith in Western medicine, even though his two brothers are among Nigeria's most distinguished doctors. On his deathbed, he declined to have orthodox medical treatment, opting instead for traditional African remedies. He was the black sheep of his distinguished family who wanted him to study medicine in Britain like his brothers. Fela refused, but left for England without his parents permission and studied at the Trinity College of Music, Oxford, instead.

It was in 1963, after Fela returned to Nigeria from Europe and America, that he formed his band, Koola Lobitos, and began to play a winning mix of jazz and traditional African music. In 1969, after a successful tour of the US, Fela abruptly changed the medium of his music from singing in Yoruba, his mother tongue, to Pidgin, the Creole English spoken along the West African coast from Gambia and Sierra Leone to Nigeria and Cameroon. It was a deliberate political move designed to reach a wider audience. In Pidgin, Fela criticised the Nigerian military authorities and the rampant corruption in Nigeria and neighbouring West African countries.

Fela's "scandalous life" was one of the most chronicled in the world of African music. But he defiantly withstood an avalanche of slander and persecution by a succession of military juntas. Fela speedily churned out his rhythmic melange of Afro-beat and jazz, even as the soldiers gave chase.

Jumping in and out of the limelight when it took his fancy, Fela was not a private man. He once told me that the protection of one's privacy is a Western and bourgeois concept. "It's a trick to protect one's loot and booty," he said. "I have nothing to hide, or to show off. No appointment needs to be made. My friends just drop in to see me when they feel like it," Fela explained.

His notoriety endeared him to many. Fela was a robust defender of the underdog. He was born into a well-to-do family, but was never rich — he shared whatever he had with his many wives, children, friends and fans. He has a sufficient fund of popular goodwill to ensure his status as an African folk hero.

Fela was a rebel with a cause. His first rebellion was against his family. His father, the Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome Kuti, was a renowned educationalist of his day, who founded the Nigerian Union of Teachers in 1931. His mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was a militant activist who organised Nigerian women against the British colonial authority to ensure that Nigerian women were permitted to vote and were exempt from paying tax to the British. She travelled to see her political mentors Mao Tse-Tung in China and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. She was the first African woman to visit the People's Republic.

Fela's elder brother, Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, former Nigerian minister of health, a former deputy director general of the World Health Organisation and a specialist in child and primary care, was with Fela as he breathed his last. He had been treating Fela from complications resulting from AIDS.

Fela's death coincided with the 57th birthday of his younger brother Beku Ransome-Kuti, currently serving a 15-year prison sentence after his conviction by a military tribunal for alleged involvement in a failed plot to overthrow Nigeria's strongman, General Sani Abacha. Fela himself was in and out of the prisons of a long succession of Nigerian military governments.

Nigeria's various military regimes all levelled reams of accusations against Fela, from high treason to fomenting social unrest and debauchery. In 1974 Fela released his bombshell, *Zombie*, which took Africa and the world by storm. The military ruler at the time felt that the album was a diatribe aimed at him and Fela was promptly imprisoned.

In 1977, Fela's home was ransacked and razed to the ground by the military authorities. His 80-year-old mother was hurled from a window of the blazing house, popularly called the Kalakuta Republic. She suffered severe injuries and died a few days later. A judicial panel set up by the military regime to investigate the incident cynically put it down to "unknown soldiers" — a phrase which became the title of a hit record which Fela released soon after the fire attack.

In 1978, Fela launched a political association — the Movement of the People. He considered standing for presidential elections in 1979, but the military regime refused to grant him approval, even though they had lifted a ban on political activities a year earlier. In 1984 Fela was arrested and charged with drug-trafficking and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Two years later, he was suddenly released after the judge who sentenced him apologised during a surprise visit to his prison cell.

Fela was no model of virtue. His most controversial misdemeanour in the eyes of the politically correct was that he was a polygamist. But Fela was no misogynist. By any yardstick Fela was a high-minded and worthy man. He helped women and young people disadvantaged through lack of opportunity. His wives and ex-wives speak fondly of him to this day and bear him no grudge.

Who were these women? Two of his wives were Ghanaian, the rest Nigerian. Some of them were strikingly beautiful, amazing dancers with bodies like amazons who performed with Fela. In New York, London and Lagos, their extraordinary elegance of movement pulled the crowds and won them tumultuous standing ovations when they stole the show with a spirited tribal dance, a true celebration of life.

Their dignity and grace in tribulation, too, won them the respect of even their detractors who had dismissed them as drug addicts. His critics declared Fela's Kalakuta Republic or "Shrine" to be a "den of iniquity" and a flurry of gossip was sparked about the goings-on inside it. Then in 1977 it went up in smoke. So when disaster struck it was a big bombshell, a double whammy. Women's organisations sounded off. Clergymen preached. A great deal of nonsense was printed in the press: "God's wrath," they crowed.

According to Fela, his decision to marry 29 women in a single ceremony was all about variety and facing a new challenge. Not all these women remained married to him. A few returned to their family homes when the going got tough. But most remained, through thick and thin, amazingly loyal to the end. Many were professional dancers and musicians who accompanied him on his tours around the world. Fela is survived by 27 of his wives and many children.

Fela did not live by the rules, and he died fighting for freedom — freedom from social restrictions and political repression. Fela was a man of consequence and character. His death closes a poignant chapter in Nigerian history.

Plain Talk

Some weeks ago I wrote about the receptiveness of English to foreign words and lauded the non-existence of an academy, similar to L'Academie Française or the Arabic Language Academy. Now, though, it would appear that I spoke too soon since only last month a serious proposal was made to create what Professor John Honey calls "a language star".

This leading professor of English wants to establish a committee that would be charged with making linguistic rules and policing the language. The professor deplores the many errors that have crept into common usage, claiming that "hardly anyone knows what's right and what is not. Even Oxford dons," he claims, "are confused about the meaning of simple words". The reason, he believes, is that they were never taught the rules of grammar and punctuation.

I cannot agree more with Honey. Having been brought up on Nesfield Grammar, I have always stuck to the grammatical rules and have advocated a return to grammar as a basis of English teaching as opposed to the so-called direct method.

My agreeing with the professor does not, or should not, mean that I am old fashioned or that I am opposed to the development of English. English has been and, I hope, will continue to be, a dynamic and constantly enriched language.

Honey rejects what he describes as a language "dictator" though he does propose a number of reforms, especially in pronunciation where, he believes, "even professors drop their i's and glottalise their t's."

Responses to the professor's arguments have been illuminating. Trevor McDonald, the chairman of the Better English Campaign, is in full agreement with Honey. "I would hesitate to use the words police the language," he writes, "but if such a committee were to try to do in the broadest sense what the Better English Campaign is trying to do, I would be delighted".

On the other hand a young woman student insists: "The French have a body like this and they are very strict about preventing foreign words entering their language. We have the richest language in the world. It is a good thing that the language changes."

Jean Aitchison, Rupert Murdoch professor of language and communication at Oxford University, is vehemently opposed to the proposal.

"Absolutely not," she writes. "It is very old fashioned and a retrograde step. They do this in France and they are a laughing stock. Language is changing all the time. What we want is to make children and adults receptive to all types of language. We don't need a group of people sitting around pontificating. The first person to suggest this sort of thing was Jonathan Swift in the eighteenth century. Most people these days *don't hold these sort of* views."

A compromise, often the most sensible solution to such controversial issues, comes from Hanif Kureishi, who writes: "It is an interesting idea. There are two things really. First there should be a common language so that people can communicate but it has to be flexible to new ways of seeing the world. The notion of language and how it develops and is used to control, and those who don't have access to a language, are of interest to a writer and are, certainly, things we should look at. So yes."

The problems facing languages will always come up for discussion from time to time. English, on the threshold of becoming the global language, is subjected to such discussions more than any other language. And when one remembers that it has produced such innovative writers as James Joyce and Virginia Wolf, one realises the flexibility of English. But there should be some kind of safeguarding it from what I call pollution, as distinct from enrichment, which brings up another issue discussed in *The Independent* by Stuart Cosgrave. In an article titled "Falling foul of the F-word", he discusses the increase in the use of swear words by modern English writers.

Mursi Saad El-Din

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An imminent demise

NEAR the spot where Al-Azhar Street intersects with Al-Mu'izz Liddin Allah Al-Fatimi Street, writes **Ahmed Abdel-Gawad**, large panels shield a construction site where the Egyptian Products Trading Company occupied a one-storey building until recently. Today, the foundations have been laid for a larger commercial edifice, which will encroach on the precious space occupied by Ottoman and Mameluke monuments all along Al-Azhar Street.

The construction site, in fact, seems set to block off Hammam El-Shara'ibi, a large seventeenth-century bath tucked away just off the main street, among a maze of alleyways. The only alley leading to the bath's main door is blocked off by piles of refuse and wreckage, while the street level has risen so high that the back door is almost invisible. The lantern set in the roof of the bath has been restored recently: while it is faintly visible from the street, the domes studded with coloured glass can only be seen from the rooftop of an adjacent house.

Like most public baths of the time, Hammam El-Shara'ibi had a plain exterior, but at least the spacious rooms inside, where residents of Gamaliyya went to bathe, relax and socialise, should be accessible to visitors.

Near the bath lies Wikalat El-Shara'ibi. Wealthy merchants often had a complex including a bath, mosque and caravanserai constructed as a religious endowment, and El-Shara'ibi was no exception.

Although both the bath and the *wikala* should be protected monuments under the law for the conservation of antiquities, it seems likely that El-Shara'ibi's legacy will face the same fate as Wikalat El-Batrawi, demolished and replaced by a wholesale textile establishment. While Hammam El-Shara'ibi may not fall before the wrecking ball, it may well be buried beneath the dictates of profit.



Photo: Ahmed Abdel-Gawad

Crumbling walls and dilapidated domes

Photos: Randa Shaath **The lantern ceiling in the background**



R.I.P.

Soha knew it was a bad day as soon as she heard the telephone ringing at 9.00am. "Gigi's mother died last night," said Mervat, foregoing the preliminaries. "Will you be going to Cairo for the condolences?" Soha did not take time to think. She loved Gigi and her mother. She loved the whole family, in fact. With Gigi's mother gone, she felt that a part of her childhood was disappearing. "Of course I'll go," she said, swallowing hard. Mervat was saying something about both of them going together, but Soha wanted to be alone. The pain was blunted by the shock now, but she knew she would want to cry at one point and she preferred to be alone. She told Mervat that she would be going later, probably with her husband, and thank you for asking, but no, she wouldn't be needing a lift. She had known all along that it was Mervat who had hoped for a lift but would not come out and say it frankly; today, however, Soha felt she had no patience for social games.

With tears streaming down her cheeks, she threw a few things in a bag. She would be back tonight. She hated Cairo in July and what lay ahead would not make the stifling city more attractive. She took out a black skirt and a black blouse and put them on, reflecting that black looked sadder in summer. She swallowed her tea, pushing the newspapers away. She had little use for more tragedies. Finally she was ready. She drove fast, thinking of Gigi and her mother and the good times she had had with them. She and Gigi had been friends since their teens. Suddenly she realised that she had missed the Cairo sign and had to go back. She forced herself to concentrate on the road ahead. A couple of hours later, she was parking her car in front of Gigi's apartment building. She recognised a number of cars belonging to common friends. Not everyone had left for their summer retreats yet. It was a good thing that they had turned out to support Gigi in her time of grief. In the elevator, she felt tears welling up in her eyes. She tried to control herself. She could not show Gigi how distressed she was. She had to think of her friend. As soon as she saw her, however, she broke into painful sobs that she did her best to muffle. "I am so sorry," she whispered "I came as soon as I heard...." Gigi was hugging her and crying too. Finally Soha sat down with the other women. She could hardly see them through her tears. Someone pushed a box of tissues towards her and, some time later, a servant glided silently between the chairs to place a cup of coffee on the little table in front of her. Vaguely, the whispering voices of her friends reached her through a haze. They were talking about a man. Gigi's father maybe, but she could not really catch the drift of the conversation. She was surprised at the sharpness of her pain. Gigi's mother had not been well for quite some time, and her death did not come as a complete surprise. So why had she felt so shattered by the news this morning? She really had to pull herself together. She sat up, wiped her face, took a sip of coffee and cleared her throat; she felt slightly better. She hoped her voice would not betray her, that she would be able to say a whole sentence without bursting into tears. "How is your father doing?" she asked Gigi. Her voice was not as hoarse as she would have expected. It had sounded almost normal; so why had everyone stopped talking and turned to look at her so intently? Was that not a normal question to ask? After all, the poor man had lost his lifetime companion. She remembered that the women had been talking about him when she came in. Had she slurred her words, then? She tried again, slowly, imperceptibly stopping between each syllable. "How-is-your-fa-ther, Gigi?" she repeated. Gigi came to sit next to her. "Well, he is dead, Soha," she said gently. Soha opened her mouth, then closed it. She could not remember being more embarrassed in her entire life. How could she explain the terrible mistake... "But I was told that it was your mother..." she tried to say, then shrugged and stopped. Anything she could think of was bound to sound silly. "She is the one who was ill," said Gigi coming to the rescue, "and he is the one who died." Later, when Soha offered her condolences to Gigi's mother, she hugged the old lady very hard. She felt sad, but also happy, as if someone very dear had just escaped from a mortal danger.

Fayza Hassan

Victims of the shadow war

Women and children are essential contributors to any society's health, life and growth, yet they are routinely abused. **Amany Abdel-Moneim** reviews the *Progress of Nations* report, and finds out which countries rank first — and last — in child health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and women's status

The *Progress of Nations* report, published annually by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), assesses the quality of basic education, access to hygiene and the effect of AIDS on child death rates. It examines rates of violence against women and girls, how justice systems handle young offenders and the protection of breastfeeding from unethical advertising and marketing practices aimed at promoting infant formula.

The report describes violence against women and girls as the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world today. Its forms, according to UNICEF, are "both subtle and blatant and its impact on development profound." In the words of Carol Bellamy, UNICEF executive director, "no statistic can capture the impact of violence that is directed against girls and women simply because they are female, yet that violence thwarts their development as well as that of their nations."

The shadow of violence under which girls and women live damages them physically, psychologically and socially. It affects healthy social and economic development worldwide, the report emphasises, describing a "shocking litany of violence and abuse" against women and girls.

As only one example of the extreme — unimaginable — violence practiced routinely against women, *The Progress of Nations* states that, "in India, more than 5,000 women are killed each year because their in-laws consider their dowries inadequate." The report also shows that in some countries of the Middle East and Latin America, husbands "are often exonerated from killing an unfaithful, disobedient or willful wife" under the pretext that her behaviour shamed the family, or tarnished the man's honour. Arguing that crimes against women are vastly under-reported, the UNICEF report notes that social scientists are now discovering that the scope of violent acts against women and girls far exceeds earlier estimates. For example, between one out of five and one out of seven women will be victims of rape in their lifetime. In 12 Latin American countries, a rapist can be exonerated if his victim agrees to marry him. Between 25 and 50 per cent of all women "have suffered physical abuse at the hands of an intimate partner". Nor are the industrialised countries, commonly considered "more developed" than the Third World in terms of women's and children's rights, innocent in this respect. In the US, "a woman is physically abused by her intimate partner every nine seconds"; only one per cent of battered women ever report the abuse they have suffered.

The report emphasises that violence against women also means violence against girls. In fact, some types of gender violence specifically target girls. 'Son preference' results in the widespread abortion of female foetuses, and the female infanticide is known to take place in some communities. Female genital mutilation (FGM), which has been the target of growing coverage in the media as well as widespread outrage among women's rights activists, is common in at least 28 countries. The abuse of children's rights is also relatively commonplace, according to *The Progress of Nations*: about two million girls each year (6,000 a day) undergo this amputation; more than one million children, overwhelmingly female, are forced into prostitution every day.

The remedies suggested are hardly new, but they bear repeating. "A general improvement in world can only be achieved by educating women and giving them more authority. Good schools not only instil basic skills, they also educate children about their rights," spells out the report. UNICEF argues that education for girls is a key component in efforts to protect girls from violence. Some progress seems to have been made on this front. "In Egypt, 111 community schools were operating in some of its most strictly conservative parts, with girls making up 70 per cent of the students. The plan is to have 89 more schools in operation by 1999," states Dr Leila Bisharat, UNICEF's representative in Egypt. "This year 80 pupils — most of them girls — graduated from their community schools and were awarded primary grade certificates," she adds.

The scourge of HIV continues to afflict millions, despite the hope of new — extremely costly — medication which may mitigate the damage being wreaked by the virus. "AIDS now threatens to reverse the progress that has been achieved in many developing countries over the past 30 years," stresses Bisharat. "Every day, 1,000 children around the world die from AIDS. In 1996 alone, the disease took the lives of 1.5 million people. About 90 per cent of the 23 million people currently infected with HIV live in developing countries." The report reveals that the majority of newly infected adults are under 25 years old. It also warns against a "growing complacency" in industrialised countries, where high-cost treatments have led many to believe that AIDS could be "managed". The report decries the imbalance of AIDS research priorities and calls for a shift of focus to benefit the great majority of people affected by HIV in the developing countries of Africa and Asia.

Other diseases are being combated with more success, although their virtual eradication has taken long years. "The sight of a youngster struggling to cope with the crippling effects of polio is a sight that will become rare in Egypt," states Dr Bisharat. "As a result of a nationwide drive to immunise every child, Egypt is on the verge of eradicating polio. The number of confirmed polio cases in the country dropped from 597 in 1991 to only 100 in 1996. Further progress has been achieved this year, as just seven new cases of polio were confirmed by the end of June 1997," she notes.

Younger children, of course, remain especially vulnerable to disease. Infant mortality rates seem to be on the rise globally. A "remarkable increase" is evident in the neo-natal death rate in both developing and industrialised countries. The report ascribes 85 per cent of all neo-natal deaths to birth asphyxia and trauma, tetanus, premature birth and infections. "Of the annual eight million infant deaths worldwide occurring during the first year of life, five million are neo-natal deaths. A total of 98 per cent of all neo-natal deaths are in developing countries," states the report. Dr Bisharat, however, points out that "Egypt is second only to Oman in bringing down infant mortality rates".

The Progress of Nations highlights the importance of breast-feeding. It states that the lives of almost 1.5 million infants could be saved every year if, for the first six months of life, they were exclusively breastfed. Data from 69 developing countries shows that 50 per cent or more of infants are exclusively breastfed in only 15 countries. In Egypt, the rate is relatively high, at 68 per cent. Although it is an established medical fact that mother's milk boosts children's immunity and prevents many diseases that could be fatal to very young children, manufacturers of infants' formula have targeted developing countries in a massive campaign promoting formula as better than breastfeeding. Poor hygiene and poverty — in practical terms, unsterilised bottles and formula diluted with too much (dirty) water — has exposed bottle-fed infants to a host of deadly diseases. Among the gravest threats to public health generally, in fact, is the lack of adequate hygiene and sanitation. The report finds that, in contrast to the achievements in providing clean water over the past 10 years, provision of sanitation has remained vastly inadequate because of "cost, population pressures and cultural resistance". The world sanitation crisis raises the threat of epidemics once thought to have been eradicated.

Other threats to the well-being of children seem to reflect the fact that they are not perceived as such, and therefore suffer much the same human rights abuses as adults. An adequate and appropriate response to the increasing numbers of children who break the law, for instance, has yet to be found. The *Progress of Nations* finds that, in Australia, aboriginal children are incarcerated at 18 times the rate of their non-aboriginal counterparts — presumably a reflection of the second-class status of aboriginals generally in that country. In Sudan, children are subject to punishments that include flogging, amputation and execution. In Kenya, up to 120 children a week find themselves in Nairobi's juvenile court for the 'crime' of being homeless. The majority of children in the West Bank who are sentenced according to Israeli security laws have no legal right to a lawyer. The report examines issues of criminal responsibility and argues that, regardless of the reasons for their offences, children are entitled to "fair treatment in juvenile justice systems designed to aid their return to productive society".

Contributing to the difficulties faced by Third World peoples — especially women and children — in securing their share of rights, goods and services, is the failure of the industrialised countries to provide sufficient assistance. The report examines the aid record of industrialised countries and notes that, in 1995, the latest year for which figures are available, official development assistance (ODA) slumped to the lowest level since aid statistics were first collected in 1950 The average contribution is as low as 0.27 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP), but the US comes bottom of the league with a contribution of only 0.10 per cent of GNP. The leading donor nations, measured by contributions as a percentage of GNP, are Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden. In absolute terms, Japan gives the most in ODA. The contributions of almost every country have declined since 1992, however.

Sufra Dayma

Libyan soup

Ingredients:
1/2 kg veal or beef (diced)
1 large onion (finely chopped)
2 large tomatoes (diced)
2 tbsp. tomato paste
2 bouillon cubes
1 cup orzo noodles (*lisan asfour*)
1 bunch parsley leaves (finely chopped)
2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. dried crushed mint
Butter
Salt + pepper + allspice

Method:
Melt the butter in a cooking pan. Gently fry the onion until yellowish. Add the meat and stir until slightly browned. Add diced tomatoes, tomato juice and paste. Stir well. Add bouillon cubes, season and add one litre of hot water. Leave to cook, covered, over low heat. When meat is tender, add more hot water. Bring to a boil and add noodles, cover and leave until cooked over low heat. Add parsley. Stir it in for one minute. Remove from heat. Add lemon juice and mint, and serve.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

If fishes were wishes...

Andrew Steele casts his nets

After having lambasted a certain Heliopolitan seafood emporium in this column only a couple of weeks ago, I am of a mind to reassure readers that classy fish dining is to be had in the Moorish suburb.

Wend your way down what can only be described as the driveway next to the Heliopolis branch of Peking, past the brightly lit tanks of tropical marine life, past the display cabinet and the potted plants, and there you'll find it. It's a wee place by anyone's standards, and has the air of being a well-kept secret. Concealed spots cast a watery glow on the proceedings, the nautical atmosphere driven home by a selection of fishy objets adorning the walls, and two back-lit tanks of very small fish indeed.

The menu is something of an oddity, listing such gourmet staples as 'Cheese Platter with Leats', 'Ordener (hot or cold)', and 'Crilled Octopur with Wine Geek'. It is, however, fairly entertaining, and with a little imagination, one can well decipher the delectations on offer.

We embarked on our voyage of marine epicure with Mediterranean sea shells with wine Greek and kerbs (sic). Frayed Red Sea calimari, and some *hummus* and *tahina* for good measure. The shells turned out to be little clams, boiled and dressed with a sumptuous clear broth. The wine base was more Gianaclis than Retsina, but it was certainly full of kerbs and as delicious and savoury as sauces come. The calamari was moist and pleasing, and had the chewy texture that befits it, without crossing that fine and dangerous line to rubbery, which it doesn't. The salads were scrumptious and made for a fine accompaniment.

A leisurely break then, for the gastric juices to secrete and gurgle before the comely offerings of the main disher (sic).

It's just as well to be a little wary when ordering — the English menu does not always correspond with its Arabic counterpart so it is wise to insist on an English re-cap from the maitre d' before the fish hits the skillet. We plumped for Red Snapper in a Lapester sauce (sic) and Seabass according to Caly Biak with Shrimp in a Lapester sauce (ditto). The red snappers were well filleted, and might almost have been sardines, had not several telltale conch-pink scales protruded from their flip sides. Fresh as the ocean spray would be a reasonable assessment, served with pleasantly sticky rice and a simple *garni*. Who or whatever Caly Biak may be will remain one of life's great mysteries, but the sea bass dish which carries its moniker was a feast indeed. Flavourful fillets, wrapped in succulent shrimps, rice and *garni*. Near perfect. So, to that ubiquitous Lapester sauce. The evidence from the display cabinet showed that fresh lobster was indeed a feature of the kitchen, and this sauce was one that owed much to it. Slightly creamy, but thin enough not to cloy or cling, the chef had extracted the very essence of Annie Hall's favourite crustacean and made it into gravy. Unusually for dishes with sauce, the two tasted distinctly different, the flavour of the fish prevailing through both.

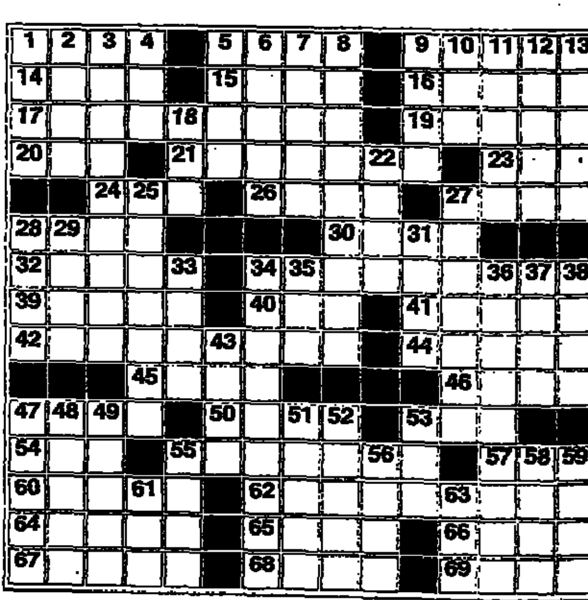
This is the fish restaurant to go to in Heliopolis, then, and the prices are pleasing. A hearty dinner for two with two Stellas came to an affordable LE90. Splice the main brace, there she blows.

La Sirena Fish Corner, 115 Osman Ibn Affan Street, off Midan Triomphe, Heliopolis
Tel: 4158714

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

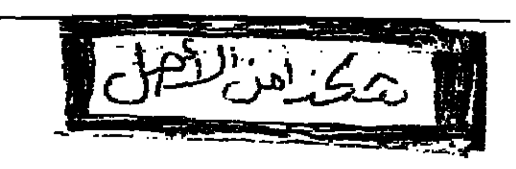
By Samia Abdennour



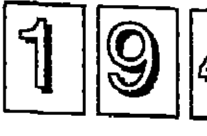
ACROSS
1. Out of work (4)
5. French abbot (4)
9. Withered; turned sour (5)
14. Inert gas (4)
15. Decorticate (4)
16. Energetic; full of life (5)
17. To resolve into one or several elements that produce results(9)
19. American aloe (5)
29. May morning, 2 wds (3)
21. Person in charge of locomotives when not in use (7)
23. Spasmodic contraction of face muscles (3)
24. Chinese unit of distance, pl. (3)
26. Chair or couch (4)
27. Expedited (4)
28. Twirl (4)
30. Desist from (4)
32. Gives up, squanders (5)
34. Practiced again (9)
39. Arabic letter (5)
40. Be under obligation (3)
41. Chic, sl. (5)
42. Miracle plays; secret religious rites (9)
44. Pitfall; unsuspected danger (5)
45. Asian country (4)
46. Federal criminal-investigation officer, hyph. wds (4)
47. Small bunch of flowers (4)
50. Originate; stalk (4)
53. Small viper (3)
54. Wrath (3)
55. Petulant; moody (7)
57. Light blow; blot (3)
60. Open air inner court (5)
62. Tape again (9)
64. Rose petal fragrant oil (5)
65. Weather directions (4)
66. Spirit lamp (4)
67. Sierra...(5)
68. Dept. Of Scientific Research of Nebraska, abb. (4)
69. Small isle in river (4)

DOWN
1. Slang word for data (4)
2. College VIP (4)
3. Confines (9)
4. One medical specialist, abb. (3)
5. Pertaining to a continent (4)
6. Felicity (5)
7. A cooking direction; type of sewing (5)
8. Face features (9)
9. Overcook (4)
10. Label; pursue (3)
11. Toy marble (5)
12. Upright (5)
13. Upright (5)
18. Expression of surprise; pl. (3)
22. Diminutive suffix (4)
25. Unskillfully (7)
27. Comes out of the blue (7)
28. Bridge feat (4)
29. Prefix denoting "much" (4)
31. Paddles (4)
33. W. African tree whose fatty nut yields a vegetable butter (4)
34. Created disturbance; harangued (9)
35. Lamb's mama (3)
36. Type of tax imposed on legal and official documents (9)
37. Mr. Pound (4)
38. Deny, jumbled (4)
43. ....-mallow = hibiscus (4)
47. Large Indian fig-tree (5)
48. Declaim (5)
49. Begin arguing or fighting vigorously, 2 wds (5)
51. Treats as equal (5)
52. Pantomidmist (5)
53. Expression of joy (3)
55. Attentive reading of book; orifice (4)
56. Stitched (4)
58. Italian river (4)
59. Pommel (4)
61. Scotch for "John" (3)
63. View (3)

Last week's solution



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life



Cairo University, Egypt's oldest and most prestigious educational institution, was inaugurated in December 1908. Its establishment was unique in more ways than one: it was founded by popular rather than government initiative and despite initial objections by the British high commissioner at a time when British hegemony over Egypt was at its height. Preparations to establish the university were highlighted by a feverish fund-raising campaign that netted record donations by the standards of the time. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story from reports published by *Al-Ahram*

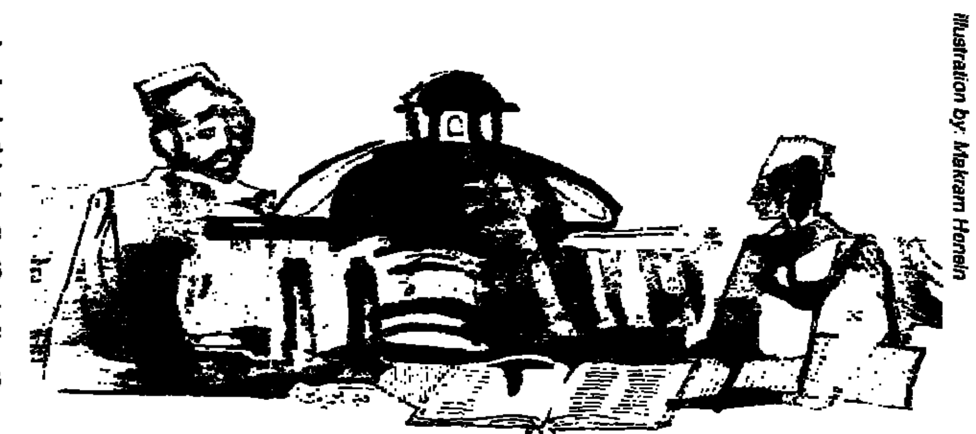


Illustration by Makram Henein

"The opening of the Egyptian university" was the headline of *Al-Ahram*'s 21 December 1908 edition, giving a detailed account of the inaugural ceremonies for Egypt's first national university.

The notion of founding an Egyptian university was the result of a popular, not a government, initiative. In fact, the government, or at least certain governing circles such as the British high commissioner's office under Lord Cromer tried to obstruct the establishment of a national university.

Egypt is unique in the Arab world for being the only country whose university did not emerge after independence. On the contrary, its national university was born during one of the severest periods of colonial hegemony.

The British argued that in a country with an illiteracy rate of over 90 per cent, a university would be a luxury that would bring little benefit to the bulk of the populace. Therefore, it was first imperative to address the problem of illiteracy and then, at a later phase, introduce the enterprise advocated by the Egyptian people. As for how long Egyptians would have to wait for this "later phase," that was another question entirely.

Certainly, Cromer did his personal best to dispirit those who had their hopes pinned on a national university. In his 1906 annual report, he wrote, "implementing such an enterprise requires time and I advise those interested in the matter to study the history of the establishment of universities in other countries and to do their utmost to help Egyptians understand the true purpose to which they aspire. It would also be advisable for them to probe more deeply into some of the pertinent details of the project, notably prerequisites for entry, the primary language of instruction, the hiring and training of instructors and many other matters."

Only after Cromer had left Egypt did the university project receive new impetus. It was the policy of his successor, Sir Eldon Gorst, to placate Egyptian public opinion and to cooperate with the khedive who took advantage of the opportunity to lend his backing to the project.

The idea of establishing a national university was first mooted in 1900. That it was born eight years later gave rise to contention among numerous claimants to paternity. In his book, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt*, the American scholar, Professor Donald Malcolm, makes mention of several of these claimants. These included Prince Ahmed Fouad (later King Fouad I) who headed the university committee during the two years prior to its establishment. Perhaps this was why the supporters of the royal family's claim named the fledgling educational institution King Fouad I University after his death. Supporters of the Nationalist Party, on the other hand, argued that Mustafa Kamel was the original author of the concept, citing as proof a series of articles that appeared in *Al-Liwa*, the party's mouthpiece, which was owned and operated by this famous nationalist leader.

Also vying for the claim were the supporters of the Nation Party which was to become the Wafd Party after World War I. They held that Saad Zaghlul, Qasim Amin and Mohamed Abdu, founding members of this party and active in the field of educational reform in general, were particularly instrumental in bringing the university to reality. Last but not least was Gurgi Zeidan, founder of *Al-Hilal* magazine. Zeidan lays claim to initiating the call for establishing an "Egyptian collegiate school" as he called it in his magazine in 1900. Such an institution was essential, he said, in order to furnish the country with the necessary reserves of manpower with higher educational qualifications and to spare the country the costs of sending Egyptians abroad for this purpose.

Perhaps the most important factor to affect the birth of the new institution was its relationship with the politics of the time. Egypt in the first decade of this century was fermenting in a powerful crosscurrent of diverse political trends. And it was only natural that the proponents of the vying trends would not only seek to lay claim to founding the Egyptian university but to use the new institution for their own benefit. The founding fathers, by contrast, wanted to prevent this at all costs, fearing that the taint of politics would impede the founding of the university. Contention over this issue was cause for more than one entanglement between the founding fathers and the Nationalist Party in particular, which favoured political activity by students.

Against this background, the articles and letters that filled the pages of *Al-Ahram* in 1907 and 1908 provide us with an intricate picture of the mechanics of establishing the new institution.

On the popular front there was a massive fund-raising campaign that brought the university into being. In a country that was accustomed to waiting for the government to initiate such major enterprises, the campaign was highly successful in mobilising a broad spectrum of society. In addition, this campaign was particularly long lasting. Unlike many other fund-raising movements of a more limited scope that come to an end once the objective is accomplished, the university campaign sets the precedent for its continuity. Not only did it last the full two years from the formation of the university planning committee in 1906 to the day the university opened its doors in December two years later; it continued after the university began operations. Perhaps it was the opposition of the British authorities under Cromer that provided the impetus for this continuity, in conjunction with the fact that it acquired its momentum at a grassroots level.

From the *Al-Ahram* accounts of this campaign, it is difficult to imagine a societal force that did not take part in this campaign. The foremost contributors, of course, were the large agrarian landowning classes, members of the liberal professions, government functionaries and students. From the moment it was established the university committee focused heavily on matters relating to this campaign.

Fund-raising committees were formed and were highly successful. By 12 March 1907, less than five months after the campaign got under way, *Al-Ahram* was able to announce that the university committee had collected LE23,652 — a magnificent sum for that period.

Also unique to this campaign was the amount of land put into trust for the university. Frequently such acts of generosity were accompanied by large fetes, scrupulously covered by *Al-Ahram*.

The fund-raising campaign had its lighter side. *Al-Ahram* reports that Constantine Shadudi, "the pharmacist in Beni Suef," had quit smoking for three months, "in order to donate what he saved from the habit engendered by this poisonous plant to the Egyptian university. After the first month, he had saved 30 piastres. So delighted was he at this progress that he was inspired to continue until he developed a profound hatred for this harmful habit. Now Shadudi urges all smokers to follow his example."

In establishing Egypt's first national university, the founders were particularly keen to emphasise its non-denominational character. Although this was noted in *Al-Ahram* on several occasions, on 2 May 1908 the newspaper gave a special plea for the cause. The university, it said, was founded by "wise leaders in the nation who are eager to make this a university for the acquisition of knowledge for all our diverse creeds. In this university, Jews, Christians and Muslims will not simply be Jews, Christians and Muslims, they will be more. The university will be a place for all, regardless of their religion or beliefs of conscience, to dedicate themselves as brothers toward the edification of their minds, the education of the nation, the dissemination of the light of knowledge, the solidification of the bonds of brotherhood, and the enhancement of the spirit of justice, liberty and equality. This is the spirit that has brought Europe into pre-eminence while the lack of this spirit has brought the Orient, in spite of its greatness and munificence, into servitude. If the Copt wishes to be a brother to the Muslim and the Muslim a brother to the Copt, they can be so in the university, for nothing binds men as strongly as the bonds of knowledge."

The university planners were also keen to stress the difference between the university and other higher educational institutes that had existed in Egypt since the time of Mohamed Ali and his grandson Ismail. According to the founders, the latter were practical institutes "where the student's aims are focused entirely on their future careers and the function of which is to produce a reserve of doctors, lawyers and engineers." As for the university, its purpose was "to encourage people, regardless of class origins or ideological affiliations, to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge in the hopes of raising the general standards of the populace through the enhancement of the qualities of its individuals."

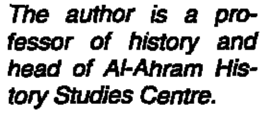
A major concern of the planners was to ensure adequate staff for the new institution. Toward this end, the planners organised study missions to European universities in order to "prepare a number of candidates to be professors capable of undertaking the duties of higher educational instruction in Arabic." The first such mission comprised 10 students, half of whom would concentrate on the humanities and the other half on the sciences.

It was the selection of European professors that caused an uproar among those following the progress of the university. For its part, *Al-Ahram* felt obliged to defend the decision. "When the subject involves learning from another nation, the committee selected those best qualified for the task. Thus it selected French and British professors to instruct our students in the arts of literature from those nations. Where science and art marched side by side, it has decided to bring in the best experts from Italy where the metal of both the ancient and modern arts was struck."

As for the choice of the primary language of instruction, this was universally accepted. On 28 April 1908 the committee announced that "Arabic alone will be the medium of instruction and promoting the advancement of knowledge among Arabic speakers."

Once the groundwork had been laid, there only remained the inaugural ceremony itself. This took place on 20 December 1908.

The following day, the university opened its doors to the students.



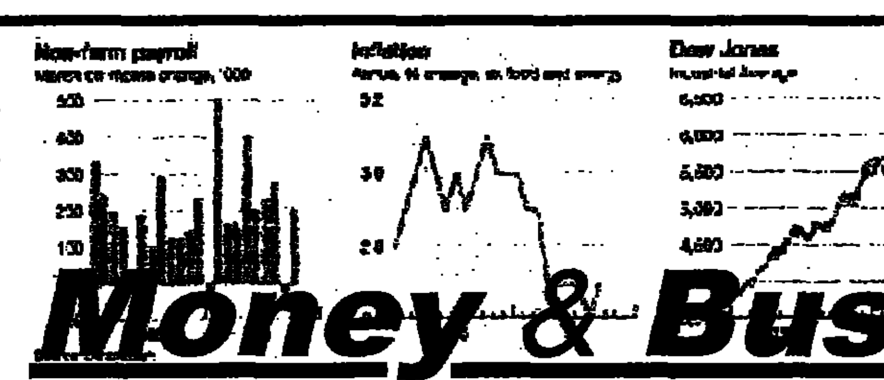
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Promoting Egyptian exports in Bosnia

THE EGYPTIAN Products Centre, in cooperation with the Commercial Representation Office, will send a delegation to Bosnia, Romania and Hungary during the course of a two-week visit to these countries in September and October. The delegation will include experts from the Egyptian Exports Centre, a number of businessmen and a group of officials from the Commercial Representation Office.

Dr Hamdi Salem, head of the executive department of the centre, stated that the delegation will discuss providing access to Egyptian exports such as cotton, pharmaceuticals and dyes.



ACITEX continues to grow

BECAUSE of the success the Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) has received in the last five years, Al-Ahram will hold its 6th exhibition from 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre in order to accommodate the increasing numbers of visitors to the exhibition. ACITEX will he held concurrently with the Artificial Intelligence Conference, which will host a group of exports in this important field from all over the world. It is worth noting that Al-Ahram has embarked on a massive promotional campaign for the exhibition, with the aim of meeting its marketing goals.

In a report by an international credit rating institution:

Flagship bank NBE turns from a commercial to a universal bank

AFTER due diligence that lasted for months, Standard & Poor's (S&P) assigned it BBB-/A-3 counterparty credit ratings to the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) for long and short term obligations.

Such credit ratings are the highest to be received by any Egyptian bank, since no institution can obtain a rating higher than the sovereign rating assigned to Egypt by S&P.

It is worth mentioning that these ratings are assigned only to distinguished banks which possess strong intrinsic financial strength. Typically, such banks are important institutions with valuable and defensible business franchises, good financial fundamentals and an attractive and stable operating environment.

Furthermore, these credit ratings place NBE at the top of the Egyptian banking system, since the bank commands a 21.5 per cent market share of loans and deposits, in addition to a dominant share of the domestic retail market, sound financial fundamentals and strong liquidity.

In spite of the high annual provisions built up by NBE to face problem loans of ailing public companies, the bank is capable of maintaining operating profits sufficiently high to absorb this massive amount of provisions while permitting a good bottom line profit.

As a result of such ratings, NBE has occupied a front position among other Arab banks that received credit ratings. Fortunately, this event coincides with NBE's celebrations of its centenary that takes place in June 1998.

Though NBE has remained the flagship Egyptian bank during its hundred years of operation, a real breakthrough in its performance was recently achieved by adopting a philosophy geared towards universal banking. Accordingly, the bank maintained a prominent position ranking 350 among world banks and 10 among Arab banks.

It is worth noting that S&P assigned Egypt an investment grade, which positively affected Egypt's image worldwide. Moreover, S&P's rating moved Egypt from speculative to the investment grade, representing thus a turning point for the Egyptian economy which currently ranks equally with some industrial economies, such as Poland and the Asian Tigers. S&P's rating also highlights prospects that Egypt can attract financial and direct investments in addition to reducing the cost of foreign transactions.

American Express recognises all Middle East employees

ON THURSDAY 24 July, American Express staged a Middle East-wide Employee Appreciation Day. Employees from Bahrain and offices all around the Middle East were thanked for their collective efforts and dedication to the company — and given the afternoon off.

This year's event entitled "The Sweet Smell of Success" is part of American Express' drive to become the "Best Place to Work", an initiative launched by Harvey Golub, chairman of the American Express Company, the aim being to improve employee satisfaction within the company.

The event was a wonderful surprise to American Express employees in the Middle East region, as it had been kept under wraps until the actual day. Staff arrived at their offices on Thursday to be greeted by decorations, yellow balloons and cakes. On each desk lay a beautiful gift, a single yellow rose and a personal card of thanks from Mr George Efthyvoulidis, vice-president and general manager of AMEX (Middle East) EC. The theme "The Sweet Smell of Success" depicted by a yellow rose, was echoed throughout, creating a splendid scene.

At 13.00 all staff gathered in their respective offices and were read a speech from Mr Efthyvoulidis. The speech highlighted the tireless efforts of all the staff, especially "the continued commitment to customer service, quality and efficiency". He personally thanked all the employees for all their hard work and cut a celebration cake.

Aptech offers franchising opportunities

APTECH offers over a hundred different courses in Information Technology through our network of 700 centres spread across India, Malaysia, Bahrain, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Oman, Qatar, Kenya and Nepal. Centres are shortly starting in Singapore, Kuwait and many other business partners have been finalised in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. Aptech is unique because:

1. It has the largest network of centres in Asia and probably the world.

2. It was the first Asian institution to be awarded the prestigious ISO 9001 International Quality Certification for Education Support Services.

3. It has a successful network of over 700 business partners worldwide.

4. It has educational alliances with renowned institutions of higher education, such as the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, UK and the Open University of British Columbia in Canada.

In any country outside India, Aptech prefers to work with one major partner who is trained in all aspects of the education operations and subsequently takes on the responsibility of supporting a sub-franchise network in the country. The choice of being a master franchise is usually given to the first business partner in the country after six months of successful operations of the first training centre. The master franchise has then to identify suitable/viable locations and business partners to set up centres in these locations. He is also obliged to set up a core team of trained professionals to provide support to the centres.

Any of Aptech's senior managers will be glad to answer all your questions. Speak to Rajinder Bali or Sanjeev Chowdhary. They are available at tel. 973-213014 and 91-22-6389831 or can be reached through e-mail at aptechme@batelco.com.bh and sanjeevc@aptech.ac.in respectively. Fax:8389828.

Waiting for the birds

As bird migration season approaches, bird watchers and ecologists in Egypt prepare for a flurry of feathered guests. **Sherine Nasr** gets herself a new set of binoculars







Almost 82 per cent of the world's population of white storks pass through Sinai during autumn migration on their journey south *photos: Khaled El-Fiqi*

"Our friends on wings are expected to come a bit late this summer," says Jim Dinsmore. But he is not talking about jet-setting comrades who have pressing social engagements. Dr Dinsmore is talking about birds. Dinsmore heads the Sinai Wildlife Project, Egypt's first and only wildlife rehabilitation centre, which will soon enter its busiest season of the year.

During autumn migration, from August to December, birds start flocking from Europe and fly as far as South Africa. The Red Sea coasts are a major migration route for birds and Egypt is a major stopping point on the way. Every year, 32 different species of raptors and cranes and 82 per cent of the world's population of white storks pass through Sinai on their journey south. From August to October, Al-Zaraniq nature reserve is a way station for ducks, herons and seagulls. Meanwhile, birds of prey, such as the peregrine falcon, eagle, vulture, osprey and black-winged kite, are particularly abundant in the Gulf of Suez in October and November.

These birds receive special care from the Sinai Wildlife Project, which consists primarily of a large veterinary hospital situated in the backyard of a Sharm El-Sheikh hotel. The birds' annual migration has always been a hazardous journey, but humankind has added to the natural dangers. Dinsmore points out, "The long, exhausting journey makes birds especially vulnerable to accidents: Some are hit by cars or electric wires, while others are captured by people."

Consequently, Dinsmore and his assistants have a round-the-clock job when migration starts. The hospital turns into a beehive as it receives between 300 and 600 emergency cases per week.

The non-profit Project was established with Egyptian, German and Danish funds to preserve the natural ecological balance in the area. Although Dinsmore insists that he is running a hospital rather than a tourist centre, the Project has been attracting the attention of many tourists to Sinai of late.

Bird watchers set up their camps from Hurghada to the Gulf of Suez to see the vast numbers and many species of birds. Some of them come from as far as Great Britain and Scandinavia.

"Tourists who come to visit the hospital are often amazed to see such a facility exist in Egypt. When they go back home, they tell other friends to come and see. This is how the hospital has become quite popular within just a few years," chirped Dinsmore.

News about the facility has further spread throughout the world as television stations in France, Italy, Australia, Brazil and the US have shot numerous programmes about the site. "We get free propaganda: Tourists come to visit, they buy our T-shirts, and we use the money to buy medicine for injured birds," Dinsmore noted.

The biggest supporters of the Project are the hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh. "Hotels give us something more important than money. During migration, we receive almost 300kg of fish and meat scraps per day from each of the hotels," said Dinsmore. Hotels also provide accommodation for the volunteer doctors. Dinsmore noted that hotels fully understand the value of protecting the environment of the area: "This is smart business, because by so doing, they are actually protecting their investments."

As a long-term procedure to ensure the survival of the birds, the Project also performs an educational role. It provides its visitors with practical information about the different bird species that pass through Egypt. It also receives students from international schools, who journey into the desert on camels, learn about the ecological significance of these birds and identify various species of animal and plant life. Additionally, Project staff members go to Egyptian schools to talk to students who cannot afford to visit Sinai about wildlife and the environment.

Visitors who want to take advantage of Sinai's bird treasures should keep in mind that the feathered creatures may tarry this year because of the abundance of food provided by heavy rains in Europe and exceptionally warm weather. But when they finally arrive, man and bird will benefit: bird watchers will delight in a fascinating natural spectacle, while the birds will revel as the Sinai Wildlife Project rolls out the red carpet.

Colossi old and new

Aswan, renowned for its breathtaking antiquities dating back thousands of years, now hosts a museum containing sculptures of a more modern kind. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

They stand overlooking the Nile, not far from the temples of Philae, stark and brilliant against a burning sky. But these are stone monuments with a difference. Together they constitute Aswan's new open-air sculpture museum, opened last month by Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni.

Work on the museum started last year by holding an international sculpture workshop, says Ahmed Nawar, head of the museums department in the Ministry of Culture. On a hillside overlooking Lake Nasser, sculptors from various countries, as well as a number of international sculpture institutes, created 29 huge granite statues inspired by the antiquities in the area with Lotus flowers, an obelisk, temple gates and a scarab among the sculptures' motifs. Aswan Governorate also contributed to the project, providing lighting to enable the artists to continue working at night.

"This new museum will be an added attraction in the Lake Nasser area and an increase in the number of visitors is expected," said Nawar.

He added that the museum will enable young artists to become acquainted with different artistic schools from both east and west. The High Dam Authority has also built an air-conditioned cafeteria overlooking Lake Nasser in the area, and has developed the parks and gardens surrounding both the High Dam and the Aswan Reservoir in an attempt to attract more visitors and prolong their stay in the area. Booklets about the High Dam area in Arabic, English and French will soon be published by the High Dam Authority and will be available for a nominal fee, said Chairman of the Board Mena Eskandar.

Commemorative silver medals featuring the High Dam will soon be available for tourists as souvenirs of their visit to the Dam. Miniature replicas of the High Dam in precious stones and granite will also be available.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions.
Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~hag gay/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~oou5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. Prices are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

New City Travel is offering trips to Paris, London, Damascus and Beirut. Trips to Paris go for LE1890 for 8 days including accommodation on breakfast basis. Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE3990 including accommodation in three-star hotels including open buffet breakfast. A week trip to Damascus and Beirut costs LE2090. The price includes accommodation in four-star hotels on breakfast basis.

Hotels

Cairo
Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.
Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

South Sinai
Sharm El-Sheikh
Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.
Coral Bay Resort is offering a rate of LE120 per person for double rooms and is also offering a rate of LE700 for 7 nights including breakfast. Prices are valid until September.

Dahab
Novotel Dahab is offering a rate of LE200 per person for double rooms for three days including breakfast buffet. The offer is valid until September 1997.

Red Sea
Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



Ismaili's great expectations

Tomorrow is the kick-off of the Arab Club Winners Cup. Egyptian hopes rest with Ismaili, Egypt's sole representative in the competition. **Abeer Anwar** presents a preview

Ismailia is playing host to the Arab Club Winners Cup for the first time in its history from 15 to 25 August this year. The eight teams participating, divided into two groups, are Ismaili (Egypt), Ahli (Libya), Belata (Palestine) and Al-Ithad (Qatar) in Group A. Group B comprises Al-Shabab (Saudi Arabia), Al-Arabi (Kuwait), Al-Wahadat (Jordan) and Mouloudia (Algeria).

This is only the second time that Ismaili have participated in an international club championship. The first was the last Arab Champions Cup held in Qatar, where the team came third. They are keen to win the Arab Club Winners Cup to add to the Egyptian Cup, which they won this season for the first time for many years. Ismaili are hoping that playing on home ground will increase their chances of being winners. They also hope that last week's return of Peter Markos, the Dutch technical manager, to take responsibility for this important event will enable the team to give their best. "I know the players are ready for a challenge and will be able to entertain their fans with an excellent performance," Markos commented.

Ismaili are lucky enough to be drawn in Group A, the easier of the two groups. "But being drawn in a weak group doesn't mean the players can relax," stressed coach Markos. "When weak teams know that they are facing stronger ones, they will put in extra effort to win or draw, so we have to be on our guard."

If they make it through to the semifinals, Ismaili will meet a stronger challenge from Group B teams like Algeria's Mouloudia and Saudi Arabia's Al-Shabab.

Saudi Arabia, for example, has Gamal Al-Owiranthe, best scorer of the 1996 Asian Championships and Fouad Anwar, named as the 22nd best player in the world.

Not all the teams are so lucky. To help the Palestinian team, which is coming to the competition for experience rather than with any real hope of winning, the championship organising committee, headed by Ismail Othman, has decided to issue an invitation to train in Egypt for a week before the event.

"We know that the Palestinian players are training on sand rather than on proper grass football pitches, so we gave them the chance to train on green playing fields in Cairo for some time before the event," explained Othman. In addition, the organising committee will pay the Palestinians' accommodation expenses.

The championship will also witness the return of the Libyan soccer team, which has been excluded from international events by UN sanctions for several years. The Libyans took buses to Tunisia, and from there flew to Egypt in defiance of the sanctions.

Ismaili's resourcefulness rescued the Egyptian Football Federation from a threatened ban after Egypt said that it had no suitable venue to host the championship. The main Ismailia stadium had been ruled out because it is currently being prepared for the under-17 World Championships. The federation then refused to hold the event in Mansoura on the grounds that there was insufficient accommodation for the players. But Ismaili came up with the idea of playing all the matches in Al-Qanah Stadium.

There is one possible exception. If Ismaili make it through to the final they will be allowed to play on their home ground. The shift of venue is good news for Al-Qanah, because the organising committee's Ismail Othman has managed to convince Kamal El-Ganzouri, head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sport, to pay half a million pounds for renovation.

Meanwhile, the Arab Football Federation has decided to cancel the play-off for third place and give both losing semifinalists bronze medals instead. And the organising committee is presenting five cups: for good behaviour, for best fans, for best player, best goal keeper and for fair play.

The Ismaili line-up is: Ibrahim Safaan, Hamza El-Gamal, Fawzy Gamal, Ahmed Rezk, Ehab Galal, Ahmed Hassan, Essam Abdel-Aa'l, Beshir Abdel-Samad, Mohamed Abu Grasha, Magdy El-Siyad, Mohamed Abdel-Raouf, Ayman Ramadan and Reda Sika.

Championship schedule

Date	Matches	Time
15/8	Ismaili x Ahli	19:00
15/8	Belata x Al-Ithad	21:00
16/8	Al-Wahadat x Al-Shabab	19:00
16/8	Mouloudia x Al-Arab	21:00
18/8	Ahli x Al-Ithad	19:00
18/8	Ismaili x Belata	21:00
19/8	Al-Wahadat x Mouloudia	19:00
19/8	Al-Shabab x Al-Arabi	21:00
20/8	Belata x Ahli	19:00
20/8	Ismaili x Al-Ithad	21:00
21/8	Al-Wahadat x Al-Arabi	19:00
21/8	Al-Shabab x Mouloudia	21:00
23/8	Semi-final	19:00
23/8	Semi-final	21:30
25/8	Final	20:00

Four out of five — innocent

Further tests on four out of five Egyptian athletes accused of taking steroids at the Pan-Arab Games have found no trace of any banned substances. Abeer Anwar reports

Egyptian jubilation at winning a record number of medals at the recent Pan-Arab Games soon turned to shock and dismay when it was disclosed that five athletes had tested positive for steroids. The athletes concerned — Basil El-Gharabawi (judo), Adel Mohamed (tae kwon do), Mohamed El-Maghawri and Magdi Mohamed (wrestling) and Hani Meselhi (volleyball) — were immediately stripped of their gold medals.

The athletes protested their innocence, and those close to them — colleagues, coaches and sports experts — expressed surprise and bewilderment. Some of them speculated that the results could have been wrong, the result of a mix-up at the French laboratory where the tests were made.

A medical committee was asked to investigate the cases. The players were tested again by three different laboratories, including the Orlec laboratory in Germany, the world's largest steroid laboratory. Results were negative for four out of the five athletes.

The idea that judo champion Basil El-Gharabawi could have used steroids was one that judo federation manager Samir El-Hadi refused to countenance. El-Gharabawi is a world class athlete, and has been Arab champion for the past nine years, so why suddenly turn to steroids at the Pan-Arab Games — where there was no strong competition — when he had never resorted to drugs before, even when facing the world's top judokas, El-Hadi asked.

"Since I heard the news, I have done nine analyses, five in Egypt and four abroad and the results were all negative," El-Gharabawi said. The substance that was found in his urine sample was strychnine, a poision that also functions as a brain stimulant if taken in small doses, he explained.

"I was so upset that I couldn't prepare for the World Championships," he said. His mood improved, however, when the negative results came through. He is willing to undergo a biopsy to further prove his innocence. A biopsy would reveal traces of the drug for up to six months after it was taken, whereas strychnine disappears from urine after 24 hours.

Tae kwon do's Adel Mohamed was accused of taking lasix (furosemide), a substance that increases urine production and thus allows an athlete to lose weight. But Mohamed did not need to lose weight. "I am already thin. I'm in the under 58kg category but I only weight 56kg so I need to increase my weight, not the opposite," he said. His second sample tested negative.

Wrestler Mohamed El-Maghawri was accused of taking anabolic and rogans (mechnolon) steroids. Traces of these steroids continue to appear in urine samples 24 days after use, but El-Maghawri's second blood and urine samples tested negative.

Hani Meselhi, captain of the volleyball team, was said to have taken methyl testosterone, another steroid, which also remains in the body for 24 days. Here again, the second analysis found no traces of the drug. "I could not believe I had been accused of taking steroids because I never drink anything more than tea and cola," said Meselhi. According to friend and teammate Maged Mustafa, Meselhi started to question everything he had consumed during the Games, even vitamin pills, looking for an explanation of the test result. "Why would I take steroids?" he asked. "Volleyball is a collective sport which depends on teamwork, not on any one individual."

Wrestler Magdi Mohamed Youssef is the only one of the five who seems to be guilty as charged. Traces of decadurabolin (nadrolone), a drug which strengthens muscle but leads to cancer and anaemia, were found in his first sample, and his second test also proved positive.

After the new analyses were completed, the medical committee of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) recommended that sports federations and the NOC should build a lab in Egypt to test for steroids. "We have a number of private labs that are working in steroids but the problem is that we lack a national, public laboratory, under the supervision of the International Athletics Federation," commented Amr Elwani, head of the medical committee. He appealed to the business community to help with the funding of such a project, the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa.

Secondly, all Egyptian athletes should be made aware of the side effects of taking steroids, and seminars should be held and films shown to increase awareness. There should also be training for doctors working with sportsmen and women on how to deal with drugs and medicines and on which medicines are classified as steroids or contain steroids. In addition, the NOC should instruct the federations to test their players regularly, on a weekly or a monthly basis.

The NOC has reported the new results to the Arab Athletics Federation, but it seems unlikely that any action will be taken to restore the players' medals. The Egyptian federations, on the other hand, are unlikely to punish athletes following the new test results. In Egypt's eyes, the athletes have been proved innocent.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Samir Guda (l), Egypt's sole professional basketball player, in Greece

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

The pain of being pro

When basketballer Samir Gouda hopped on a plane to join the national team for the African Nations Cup, he was trying to reconcile conflicting obligations. **Ossama Khalil** met him in Senegal

Samir Gouda, 25, would not have been a sports celebrity in Greece today had he not defied the Egyptian Basketball Federation (EBF) ban on professional basketball. Four years ago, the 2.17-metre athlete went abroad, first to the United States and then to Greece. He became the only Egyptian professional player in the European League, but this position failed to protect the talented sportsman from attacks back home. A crisis developed between Gouda and the EBF just ahead of the recent African Nations Cup.

Gouda was reluctant to join the national team in Senegal, but he was not the only one. Several top players cited job and personal responsibilities to avoid taking part in the African competition. Gouda, who has recently signed a $1.2-million contract with a Greek team, found that the club's schedule conflicted with the African games, and had to decline to participate in the African games. Suddenly, all hell broke loose back home. Press and basketball officials were furious at Gouda's perceived disloyalty.

Recalling the crisis, Gouda said, "The Greek club refused to give me permission to go... fearing that I may get injured as African basketballers tend to play rough." Gouda accepted his employers' position, but a phone call back home changed his mind.

"Then, I called my mother and found her crying because of what was written in the newspapers... Apparently, a fierce propaganda campaign questioning my loyalties was under way."

Gouda immediately went to the club manager, pleaded to be allowed to leave and even threatened to break his contract.

As it turned out, the trouble was not fully justified. Gouda's performance in Senegal was disappointing, a matter which he says was due to exhaustion and nervousness and the fact that he was unfamiliar with the national team's tactics. Even before the cup games ended, Gouda had to leave Senegal. The Greek club, having lost a crucial game, called him up and told him he must return. The responsibilities of professional basketball could not be ignored for long.

But Gouda was not disheartened by the Senegal episode. He wants to play again for Egypt when the occasion arises. "I am an Egyptian player and will play for Egypt when needed. I will never sign a contract banning me from playing for my country."

Gouda ended the interview with his plea to the EBF and the Egyptian players to shed their fears from professional sports. "Egypt has a great supply of skilled players. Let them go out in the professional world. Let them try."

Basketballers score low in Africa

Egypt's basketballers only managed fourth place at the African Championships, and failed to qualify for the World Cup. **Ossama Khalil**, reporting from Dakkar, examines the reasons for the national team's downfall

Egypt, once African basketball champions, have flunked ignobly out of the African Championships and thus failed to qualify for the World Cup. The national team took fourth place in the championships in Dakkar, Senegal. Nigeria emerged as final champions, with Senegal coming second.

From the start, the Egyptian team seemed to be suffering from lack of spark, lack of preparation and, above all, low morale. The Egyptian Basketball Federation (EBF) was quick to blame player inadequacy, particularly the clear lack of cooperative competitive spirit, for the poor performance. Federation President Mahmoud Ahmed Ali unashamedly placed full responsibility at the players' door. They had not, he said, performed to the best of their abilities and had failed to fulfil their responsibilities both off and on the court. Ali added that he would be taking a tough line with the team in future.

Another clear factor behind Egypt's defeat was lack of preparation. The team spent only four weeks in training camp — much less than usual and much less than teams like Nigeria, Senegal and Angola. Not only that, but there was a high level of absenteeism from the camp, followed by the blow dealt by the absence of four of the country's top basketballers — Fathi Abdel-Aziz, Ashraf El-Kurdi, Mohamed Abdel-Moteleb and Sherif El-Sanadelli — who couldn't make it to the tournament itself.

Meanwhile, a press campaign was begun against Samir Gouda, an Egyptian pivot playing for a professional Greek team, who had said he would not be able to join the national team for the championship. Gouda eventually succumbed to media pressure, joining the team in Dakkar a few hours before the championship began. But, probably because of his late arrival, he wasn't in tune with his teammates and was not able to achieve much in the championships.

With all these negative factors, it was hardly surprising that the team played poor, subprofessional basketball. In their first match in Group Two, Egypt managed to beat Mali 63-52. But this early success was quickly reversed when Egypt lost 43-62 to Angola, holders of last year's African title. Experts and coaches agreed on Egypt's luck in drawing to play the Cape Verde Islands, known as a weak team, in the next match. But even here it was touch and go up until the last minutes. Egypt eventually won by a mere 56-51, taking second place in Group Two and securing a place in the semifinal.

Meanwhile, competition had been fierce in Group One, which contained Senegal, Nigeria, Central Africa, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa. Nigeria finally emerged as top of the group; Senegal was second.

Egypt was pitched against Nigeria in the semifinal, and experts predicted a devastating victory by the Nigerians, who had proved themselves an African powerhouse, in stark contrast to Egypt's weak showing against weak teams. But the Egyptians surprised everyone by playing a strong game up until the 13th minute of the second half. Then something seemed to snap. The players suddenly became confused for no apparent reason. Their play went downhill fast, allowing the Nigerians to score point after point. They won the game 61-51, putting Egypt out of the championship.

The reason for the confusion was revealed after the match. There had been a sharp disagreement between Marv Kessler, the American technical manager who had been with the team for only seven weeks, and his assistants Ashraf Tawfik and Essam Abdel-Hamid. The row happened when Kessler substituted playmaker Hisham Abu Serea. There followed an altercation in which Abu Serea maintained that he should remain on court, while Kessler insisted that he should sit out for a while. Abu Serea then became abusive to the coach, which Kessler considered unforgivable. He insisted that he should remain out for the rest of the game as punishment, despite the protests of Tawfik and Abdel-Hamid. Kessler assured his two assistants that he would take full responsibility for his decision.

All that was left for Egypt was to play a match to decide the third and fourth positions. It was a sadly depleted national side that faced Angola for their final match. Egypt had only seven players left. Samir Gouda had returned to his professional team in Greece, Ismail Ahmed and Tarek El-Ghannam had travelled to Melbourne to join the national under-22 team for the junior World Cup, and two other players were in bed with a stomach bug.

In the circumstances, Kessler was pretty satisfied that his team lost by only 24 points, 55-79. Angola thus moved up into third position and the disappointed Egyptian team had to content themselves with fourth place.



Galal Amin:

Only a true renegade could rebel against the very discipline to which he continues to devote his life

Culture conversant

The little toy soldier on the steps leading to the villa points a gun at you, playfully belligerent. It was left there randomly by a grandson who finds an ideal playground, unrestricted and affectionate, in his grandparents' home.

Galal Amin appears when we ring the bell, a shadow emerging slowly, at first, until he flings the screen door wide open. His halo of grey-black hair endows him with a rumpled, teddy-bear look. He leads us into a blur of colour and light, over polished wooden floors, past wall tapestries, gleaming copper and trees waving in through the windows. The destination is a little den crammed with scattered books and papers. The photos of his three children stand on the white shelves, and he begins with them: two boys and a girl. He is proud of the way they have progressed, happy that his daughter, "who lives a few steps away" from the small villa in Maadi, still finds in her parents' house an extension of her own home. And so it is with his sons, although both live in the States now. One works at Microsoft, the other is studying the psychology of education. He chuckles, drawing the words out in his low, gravelly voice: "I read Bill Gates's book *The Road Ahead* — he may be the only person who *almost* had me convinced of the validity of modern Western technology. Almost."

An economist, now more concerned with what he terms the "cultural component", he has always focused on the subjectivity of economics as a social discipline. Amin has been one of the most outspoken and independent critics of Western hegemony over developing nations: "pushing societies and individuals into patterns they are not ready for". His words are not simplified, nor do they convey simple ideas. But he can express exactly what he thinks without resorting to jargon. A proverb or a colloquialism will do just as well as a theorem.

A critic of the West, then; but when it comes to personal aspirations, and his hopes for his children, it is to the West that he has turned, happy that they have been able to make a mark in "an aggressive and competitive world". Is he an armchair intellectual, a man for whom theory remains divorced from the reality of things? He welcomes the question, which he seems to have heard before.

His wife Janice enters at this point, bearing glasses of orange juice followed by Turkish coffee in clay cups. They met, and fell in love, in England, in the early '60s, while he was studying at Oxford. Their life together is simple and calm. Janice has always refused to be isolated in the foreign community, deeming it "unhealthy" — she speaks Arabic fluently.

"Back to the question about theory and reality," says Galal Amin, not one to be sidetracked. "I am not a martyr by nature, and I have not found my 'intellectual concerns' to be a particular cause of happiness, so I wanted to isolate my children from these concerns. But that does not mean that one should not have a vision." He rearranges the files which cover the desk to make space for the cups, balanced precariously on the visitors' knees. "One of my idols is George Orwell, another is Noam Chomsky. They both had a very poor opinion of the world, and neither had any illusions over the ease of change. Orwell in *1984* was pessimistic, but he never stopped trying to enlighten people. And since, in the 'new global economic order', we are actually heading towards an Orwellian world, for goodness' sake let us *do* something. I believe that we can overcome all of this, in the capacity of human beings to change things for the good, but I don't think a positive change will happen quickly."

The metro, a few minutes away, bellows mournfully. In an hour, he will take it to the American University, to tell students about economics.

How does he manage to teach a discipline which has often been the butt of his scathing wit, which he describes as "absurd"? Economics, he often says, should not exist in the first place, because it obscures things, evades the important questions rather than answering them. It sets up criteria to measure development, establishes a 'human development index' — he snorts derisively — "but life is not figures. Have you ever heard of anything more absurd than saying that a society which has more television sets or washing machines is better than one which does not?"

Nevertheless, he teaches established economic theory. "The economics of Adam Smith, of how much one should pay for a cup of tea — I teach that — but.. so what?" He blows a mocking raspberry. "I teach conventional economics because I have to, but I prefer to teach economic development, or the history of economic thought, because they show the relativity of truth, and how metaphysics affect social thinking."

Born in Cairo in 1935, in what he describes as "an urban background", Amin obtained his PhD in economics from Oxford University. He was first influenced by Baathist thought, then Marxism, and, ultimately, culture as a unit of analysis — a shift away from the economic determinism of Marxist theory.

"From the early seventies, I had doubts about where Western civilisation and its consumerism was going. Also, what we used to accept as social science, economics included, is often value judgement and is largely ideological. Now we are faced with 'globalisation', which is the victory of the market — not even market economics, but the market. The word has a nice sound to it, it is a polite word for hamburgers invading the former Soviet Union, and precious things being put up for sale. You find values which go with this — for instance, the word 'aggressive' to connote a positive attitude in expressions such as 'aggressive marketing'. Imagine marketing becoming a specialisation, a science, with professors of marketing whose aim is how to deceive people into buying something they did not need in the first place."

Phenomena usually portrayed as so natural that they escape detection outrage him. He is a rebel, and a man whose ideas do not sit easily with the establishment, although he plays a prominent role in public life through his published studies and articles. Perhaps he took on a more rebellious role, he says, because he was the youngest of eight children, "and I had to assert myself". He will not enter into camps, or define himself ideologically. His father, Ahmed Amin, was a major figure of the liberal age, the 1920s and '30s, today retrospectively classified as the 'age of enlightenment'. Galal Amin himself is critical of excessive references to "the banner of rationality and enlightenment raised by Egyptian and Arab intellectuals, a scourge which they are now turning on Islamic fundamentalists, as if they were the sole threat, the only cause of backwardness in the region".

For Amin, the assumption that rationality and enlightenment are Western values is equally dangerous. The West is posited as the paradigm of objectivity and progress, and the new economic order is closing in. Israel, "whose real role is that of an agent of Westernisation in the region", will acquire a new edge, because of the economic and technological advances it has made. The link between intellectual criticism and political analysis is made effortlessly. This is familiar terrain.

In *The Modernisation of Poverty*, published in the early '70s, long before the theme was fashionable, he was already writing that, through the imposition of Western criteria, poverty — or the manner of evaluating it — becomes Westernised, but poverty itself is not reduced.

Although his "intellectual concerns" devour most of his waking hours, he is equally passionate about singers and politicians. A book he wrote was published recently in Lebanon, a series of profiles ranging from Laila Murad to Anwar El-Sadat. He shrugs. "I find that writing about human beings is more genuine, somehow." This eclecticism, after all, is an offshoot of his disdain for elitism of all sorts. In the 1970s, he acclaimed the immensely popular singer Ahmed Adawiyya, reviled and despised by critics and elites alike. To accusations that Adawiyya personified the deterioration of Arabic music, Galal Amin replied that his music and lyrics were an expression of new, socially mobile groups, and should be appreciated as such.

On the small porch of the villa which the Amins built in the early '60s, one can hardly tell that Maadi has gone forth and multiplied. Nestled away from the hubbub of the city, the house is more convenient for the relaxed pace of their life. They socialise, but with extreme moderation. Galal Amin's friends are those he describes as possessing honesty and humour- professor of mathematics Abdel-Azim Anis, author and judge Tarek El-Bishri, and ambassador Shukri Fouad. He is very close to his brother Hussein. They speak on the phone often, although they have grown apart intellectually, "because of Hussein's views". Amin has remained a staunch believer in the importance of equity — a socialist, to those who like labels.

But he feels disconcerted by the constant need to comment on economics and politics. It distracts him from things he feels are important — like the countless books acquired before he can finish reading the last batch.

He strums the violin occasionally. In the music of Zakariyya Ahmed and Mohamed Osman, he finds another revelation, an element of himself.

Profile by **Aziza Sami**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris





A bronzed Snow White in sultry summer accoutrement, but minus Sleepy, Dopey, Grumpy et al.; Nur El-Sherif, dashing as ever, in the role of Averroes

♠ As devoutly anti-fur as ever, my dears, I have whipped a convincing imitation of the real thing out of my extensive wardrobe in preparation for **Walt Disney**'s World on Ice extravaganza, which begins tonight at the Cairo Stadium's Indoor Complex. Its illustrious sponsors include the Cairo Opera, while Pyramid Advertising Agency, powered by my dear friend General Manager **Medhat Mansour**, a veritable turbo of activity, as well as charming and dynamic senior manager **Mona Abul-Naga**, has been in charge of marketing and obtaining sponsors. A very fine job they have done too, if you ask me (and even if you don't). As I was saying, my numerous nieces and nephews are already clapping their pudgy little hands in anticipation, and I have kindly offered their disbelieving parents to accompany their tiny charges to this splendid event. Little do they know, the poppets, that I have been anticipating the arrival of **Snow White** and her charming **Seven Vertically Challenged Companions** (*Dwarves, to the less politically correct among you*), for the past twelve months. As for **Prince Charming**, well, I have been awaiting him a good deal longer. And a veritable agony of suspense it has been, I can assure you. I am not sure my siblings' offspring will manage to keep up with me, as a matter of fact, since I plan to attend both shows every day for the full twelve days, as I have done for the past three years. There are eleven World on Ice shows currently touring the world, and I am seriously contemplating redefining the concept of groupie, and following them wherever they go. Bliss! In the meantime, I am attempting to pull strings and obtain a coveted backstage pass so that I too, like my friend, *Weekly* Sports editor **Inas Mazhar**, can obtain an audience with Snow White. **Inas**, much to my chagrin, has refused to tell me what helpful tips concerning poisoned apples and evil stepmothers **Snow White** revealed, so I shall have to find out for myself. I am counting the minutes...

♠ I will have to take a day off from these glacial delights, however, to attend the special screening of **Youssef Chahine**'s newest stroke of genius, *El-Masir*. For those of you languishing outside the charmed circle, the film opens in cinemas across the country on Monday, and you will just have to wait until then. Philosophy has always been my forte, and I cannot wait to find out all about **Averroes**, to be played movingly by the eminently talented **Nur El-Sherif**. I have even been polishing my rendition of *You Are My Destiny*, currently at number one on Top of the 5os, in preparation for my own homage to **Joe**, the doyen of Egyptian cinema.

